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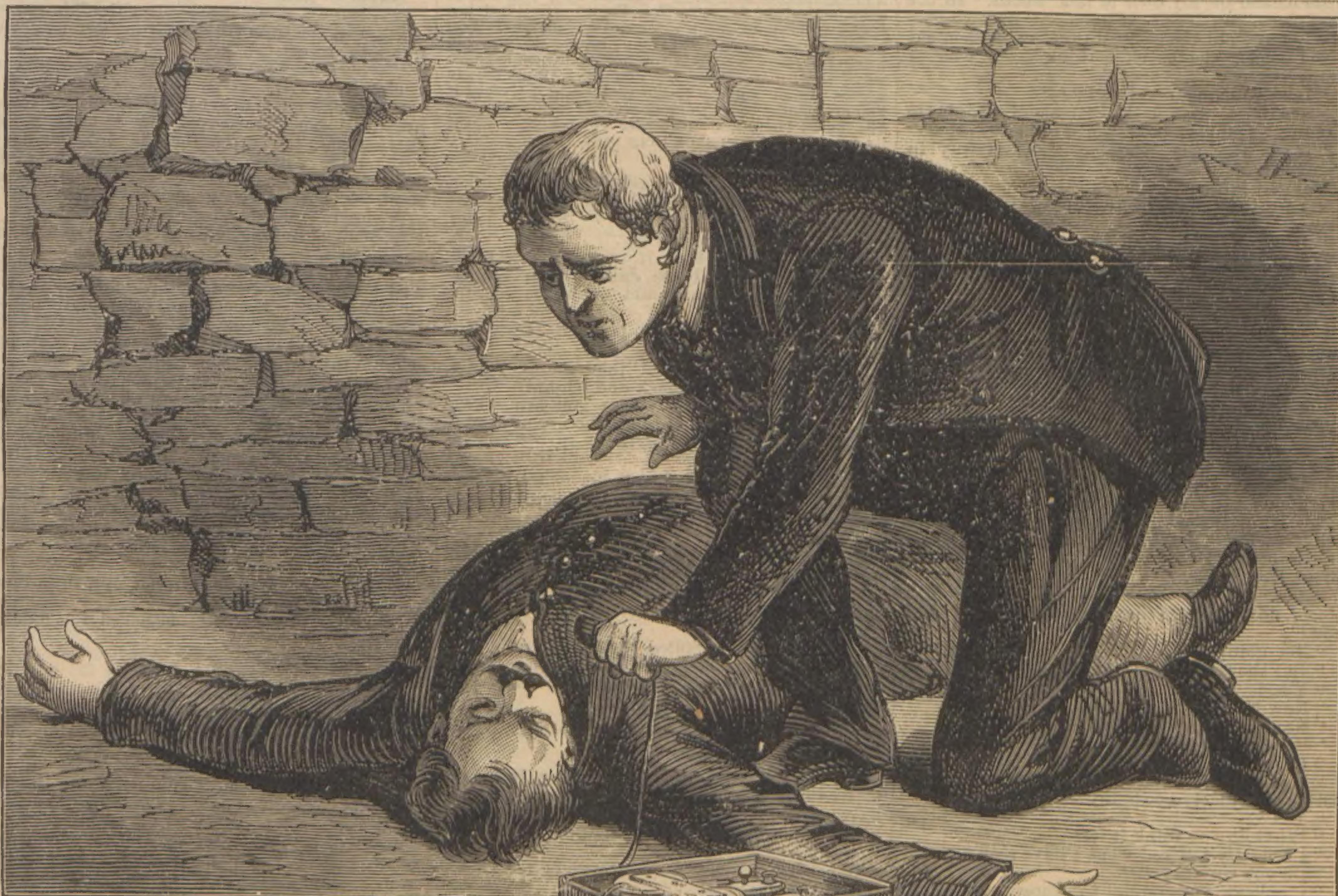
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OR, Captain Cinnabar in New York.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP," "FATHER FERRET," "LUCIFER LYNX," "HAWKSPeare," "PHIL FOX," "CAPTAIN VELVET," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LUCY LEMON.

INTO an open hallway and up a flight of steps nimbly ran a little girl, who could not have been more than fourteen.

The air was cold and blustery outside, for it was a raw March morning, and though the hour was early, New York had long been astir.

At the head of the flight the girl looked about with an inquisitive air, and then started down the corridor toward a door on which she had discovered a sign, that read:

"JACKSON JAVERT,
Independent Detective."

The next moment she was face to face with a youngish man, the sole occupant of the office.

JACK JAVERT THE INDEPENDENT DETECTIVE

CAPTAIN CINNABAR REMOVED THE ELECTRIC CONDUCTOR AT LAST, AND LEANING OVER HIS VICTIM, CALLED OUT: "JACKSON JAVERT!"

He did not appear over twenty-five, and when the girl entered he was seated in an arm-chair, with his legs complacently crossed, and a newly-lighted cigar between his lips.

His attire was clean and faultless, and one would have thought that the girl had disturbed one who was himself waiting the appearance of the man whose name was on the sign.

But, the lady visitor seemed to know that she had found the right person, for she came forward, while his expressive gray eyes scanned her keenly, and said with a polite bow:

"Good-morning, sir!"

The man returned the salutation with a smile and waved his caller to a chair.

"I am glad I have found you," said the girl. "You are Jack Javert?"

"They call me that sometimes. Will you be so obliging as to give me your name?"

"I am Lucy Lemon. I have sought you about a matter in which I am concerned; but I must say, beforehand, that I am not rich enough to reward you for any trouble you may be put to in my behalf unless—"

"Do not let a want of means bother you," Javert interrupted, smiling encouragingly. "You may speak without reserve here. There is an old saying that the first customer of the week, if a lady, brings the establishment good luck, and I am therefore more than willing to listen to you."

The girl smiled as she colored and proceeded, crossing her white hands on her lap.

"I have been sent to you by a lady with whom I live sometimes; but aside from this, I have a little matter of my own to talk about. In the first place, you are asked to call at number 981, M— street, at the earliest practicable moment—the sooner the better I think from what I know."

"Does your mistress live there?"

"She does. She is known as Mrs. Juliette Jansen. You may have heard of her."

"Is she the lady who had the runaway in Central Park last week?"

The girl bowed.

"Yes; the papers were full of it," she answered.

"It was a miraculous escape. The phaeton was smashed and the horse killed. It is Mrs. Jansen who wishes to see you on particular business."

"How long have you served Mrs. Jansen?"

"About three months off and on," was the answer. "I am not in her regular employ. When I am wanted she knows where to find me."

"Are your parents living, Lucy?"

The girl started a little at the question.

"Pardon me," added the detective, "I meant nothing out of the way."

"You have not offended," and the girl's eyes brightened. "I was coming to that very subject. I am through with my duty for I have delivered the message, and you know where you are wanted. Do you want to ask anything about Mrs. Jansen?"

"Yes, one or two questions. In the first place, does Juliette have many visitors just now?"

"Not many."

"But she has some?"

"Yes."

"New Yorkers?"

"Not all of them, I think."

"Some foreigners, eh?"

"I think so."

"Has anything startling happened that Juliette particularly needs my services?"

"Yes."

"What do you think it is?"

"I can only tell you what I have seen."

"Do you care to tell?"

"I believe you ought to know," answered Lucy, "and then it appears to be in some manner connected with my own career. This morning I was quitting Mrs. Jansen's house by the rear door as I sometimes do when I sleep there, when I heard a wild shriek which made me stop midway down the stair. I knew it came from Juliette's room, but I did not think it my duty to intrude. In a moment, however, I was called in frantic tones by my mistress, and rushing into the parlor, which adjoins her boudoir, I found her white as a cloth and terribly excited."

"But this was not all. On the rich carpet and half way under the piano lay a human figure apparently unconscious. I could see that it was a man, but the head was so doubled up under the arms that the face was rendered invisible. Juliette did not pay the slightest attention to this object."

"I have sustained the greatest loss of my life," cried she. "The League has struck its hardest blow, and I have suffered. The villains must think no longer that I will remain silent. I turn on them from this moment. I want the best slush in New York sent hither immediately, and they say he is Jack Javert, the Independent Vidocq. I want him as soon as he can come." Then I received my orders which brought me to you, and I left the house with the man lying on the floor, whether dead or alive I know not."

"The figure was dwarfish, I might add," the girl went on. "I could see that the legs were

unusually short and the arms seemed unnaturally long."

"Do you think your mistress had been robbed?"

The girl shook her head.

"You are not prepared to say, eh?" continued the detective. "Well, we'll let that pass. Now, do you want to come to your own business before I obey Juliette's summons?"

"It isn't very much," smiled the girl. "You have asked me about my parents. I have no recollection of them, if a certain face which vanished long ago was not my mother's. But here is a letter which was thrust into my hand last night by some one on the street. I looked to see who the person was, but I saw no one. You don't know how the writing has mystified me. I think it kept me awake nearly all night, and that is why I was leaving Juliette's house so early and was stopped by the cry in the parlor."

Lucy drew from her bosom a small, crumpled envelope, which she handed to the other, who took it with some eagerness.

"You are sure that this is not too private for me, Lucy?" he asked.

"I am. I don't know to whom I would rather show it than to you."

The girl watched him with considerable curiosity when he leaned toward the window and read:

"MY DEAR MISS:-

"Why don't you keep your eyes and ears open and learn something to your advantage? You are not the orphan you think yourself, and if you show a disposition to look after 'number one,' you can be somebody right here in New York. All the riches in this metropolis don't belong to the nabobs. You have a right to some, and if, as I have said, you will work for them, you can feather your nest in more ways than one. What do you say? Walk slowly across Union Square to-morrow night at eight if you are willing to do your share. If not, keep your distance. There are those who will take the tide at its flood. Dare you show your mettle?"

"FORTUNE."

"What do you think?" asked the girl.

"A strange scheme," said Javert.

"Is it genuine?"

"I am not prepared to say."

"Don't you see that it tries to connect my association with Juliette Jansen with the secret of my parentage and with the fortune hinted at?"

"You discovered this?" laughed the young "independent."

"Yes, and it did not take me very long, either. It is there in black and white."

"So it is. The place where you are to keep eyes and ears open is undoubtedly Juliette's house. That much is quite clear. Now, are you anxious to go on?"

"Do you mean, will I walk across the Square as a token that I will embark in this mysterious enterprise whatever it is?"

"Yes."

"I certainly shall do so!" declared the child woman, starting forward. "Something tells me that I have reached the turning-point in my career. Where will you be while I am in the Park to-night?"

"I cannot say," replied the detective. "Just now I have business with Madam Jansen. I think this is the beginning of a very interesting case."

CHAPTER II.

DEATH'S SORCERY.

WHILE this scene was transpiring in the detective's office in the heart of the great metropolis other events of a somewhat startling nature were taking place among the abodes of the wealthy.

In certain quarters no man was better known than Ruff Raymont.

Surrounded by riches that were supposed to reach into the millions, and the tenant of a splendid house, which was a palace of luxury, he was believed to pass his time in luxurious ease and happiness.

Nobody dreamed that Mr. Raymont had visitors whom he would not introduce to the society in which he moved, for no one went to the pains of setting a watch on his house or his movements or his associations.

Ruff Raymont seemed to have reached his fiftieth year. He was a fine looking person with a steel-gray eye which could grow animated at will, and his clothes were always elegant and models of adjustments.

About the same hour of Lucy Lemon's appearance in the detective's office, a woman with features rather suspiciously veiled mounted the steps of the Raymont residence and rather nervously jerked the bell-pull.

The door was immediately opened.

"Mr. Raymont is not yet up," answered the maid in rather loud tones when the caller had inquired for her master.

"Who is down there, Sybil?" called a voice from above.

"A lady, sir," replied the girl.

"Send her up to the library. I will be there in a moment."

"I did not think he was up," said the servant apologetically. "You will find the library beyond the first door to the left at the top of the

step," and stepping aside she saw the veiled woman go up the steps and vanish.

The early caller had no difficulty in finding the library. It was empty when she entered, and, as she threw back the dark vail which till then, had concealed her features, she dropped into a luxurious chair to wait for the master of the house.

She had not long to wait, for soon the door opened almost noiselessly and the woman turned to see Raymont already in the middle of the room, where the man of money halted, a hue of paleness on his cheeks. But, this was only momentary, for he came forward again and looked down into the woman's face—a face that appeared stamped with victory of some kind.

"Good-morning," said the woman, holding out a white hand, the tips of whose fingers Raymont touched, and then dropped as though he had unwittingly taken up an adder.

"We have not met for some time," continued the caller.

"No," replied the man. "Are you passing through the city now?"

"Passing through the city?" she echoed.

"No, I have come to New York to remain an indefinite period. Look at this, general."

As she finished, she dropped one of her hands into a pocket among the folds of her dress and produced a delicate, cream-colored card, on which was to be seen, in small script, the words:

"ZUBIANO!

QUEEN OF SORCERY.

Daughter of the Stars.

Raymont glanced at the card.

"When did you assume your titles?" he asked.

"About the time you took your last one," was quick the retort.

"Where is your temple of mystery?" continued Raymont.

"It is unknown as yet to my future patrons," answered the "sorceress." I have gone no further than the card indicates. In a few hours my temple will be open to the curious, and I will begin a career which will eclipse any of its kind. You do not congratulate me, general!"

A cloud came down over Raymont's brow. It was easily seen that he was trying to fight something back.

"I wish you success," said he. "But you will find New York overrun by people who deal in the black art. The columns of the daily papers will suffice to tell you this."

"Don't they all thrive?" demanded Zubiano, leaning toward Raymont, and resting on one of the arms of the chair a hand which carried a single ring, whose crest was a serpent's head with diamond eyes. "Why should I fail, I who am the equal of your best sorceresses? Mankind are fools, General Raymont. The world is full of dupes, and before the ink of my announcement is dry, I will have scores at my shrine. I think you doubt my claim to the double title of Queen of Sorcery and Daughter of the Stars. You ought to know that I am capable of doing something."

With a curious smile on her lips, the woman pushed back her chair.

"Is your door locked?" she asked Raymont.

"No."

"May I lock it?"

"Yes."

She glided across the room, closely watched by the man of money, and turned the key.

"We want no spies here. I don't like them anywhere, but here of all places. Now, let me show you how I have improved since we met last. Let me see. How long has that been?"

"You probably knew. Your memory seems good."

"So it is," was the response. "Well, we won't discuss the point, for I doubt not that your memory on that score is as good as mine. By the way, have you ever heard of Xerxes?"

"No."

"Nor of Monte?"

"No."

"Nor of Captain Cinnabar and the rest?"

Zubiano shook his head with emphasis. "That is curious," continued the woman, who stood at the table while she talked, turning the serpent ring on her finger, though she was watching Raymont through her long black lashes. "One would have thought that some of them must have turned up ere this. I did not suppose they were the men to keep off the stage. But, with a sudden smile, "maybe they have grown rich like you, general, and need not play night hawk and mountain wolves any more."

"I don't know," answered Raymont. "You seem to know more about some people than I do."

The sorceress made no reply, but her fingers suddenly stopped turning the ring, and dropped to her side.

"Let the old gang go," she urged. "I am not going to call one of them back by any arts I may possess. I think I ought to hate the most of them with a hatred born in Tartarus. But now for a sample of my skill, general."

She stepped clear of the table, and, standing straight erect her hands were thrown upward to her shoulders, and, as if by magic, her outer garment dropped gracefully to the floor, and

she stood before the astonished man arrayed in the rich drapery of an Egyptian princess!

An exclamation of wonder broke from Raymont's lips.

The next instant one of the woman's hands was lifted to her face, and a cloud of smoke hid it from his gaze.

"I am Zubiano now, as you see!" said a voice amid the smoke, and Raymont saw that the woman's skin had undergone a strange transformation, for it now had the dark hue of a face of the Nile.

As the smoke lifted and the hand dropped, a small pastille, pyramidal in shape, fell upon the table, and, in a second, Zubiano was holding over it a small match whose flame was touching the apex of the cone.

"In God's name, what manner of creature is this?" must have flashed across Raymont's mind.

Zubiano said nothing, but went on quietly with her work.

The flame of the match grew larger, and presently a dense smoke with a pungent though not disagreeable odor began to fill the room.

The fumes of the burning pastille seemed to penetrate every quarte of the watcher's lungs. He attempted to expel them, but succeeded only partially.

It was astonishing what volumes of smoke could roll from such a little pyramid. They at first rendered the sorceress indistinct, and then hid her altogether.

"Carry out your design and let me get my breath," cried Raymont battling heroically with the choking fumes. "I don't see anything wonderful in suffocating a man. Is this the extent of your black arts, woman?"

"In a moment," came through the smoke. "We must wait for the moment."

"No, I will not—no without air at any rate."

Raymont left his chair and turned toward the nearest window, but he suddenly found his limbs too weak to carry him.

His lungs were filled with the noxious vapors; his brains swam!

"Woman—there is a deep play in this devility!" cried he, trying to face the now unseen magician, though he fell back into the chair.

"You are right! I am playing a game that will beggar you and yours. Did you think I would never try to get even, Raymont, as you call yourself now? You've woven a pretty web, you golden spider, since we parted company! Why didn't you make some of the old gang keep track of me? You have just told me that you know nothing of the whereabouts of Xerxes, Monte, Captain Cinnabar and the rest. *Liar!* It does my very soul good to throw this into your teeth. One half of the old gold gang are here, and they are your slaves still. Look at me, general! Do I resemble the woman you left, long ago, in one of the first webs of your spinning? No! you don't see well now, but you hear every word I say. Xerxes may come and find you here. Or the beautiful fly of the web may be the discoverer. Well, never mind which one comes. You know that I am still able to play a strong hand!"

The speaker drew back with eyes aflame as it were, and for several moments stood off and looked at the apparently dead man in the chair.

"It will be worse than a pastille, next time, if you don't acknowledge the supremacy of the Queen of Sorcery!" she mocked. "Set your dogs on my trail—I wish you would! I want something to do. Good-by, general!"

She went out, and, as the door closed behind her the body of Ruff Raymont pitched forward on the floor, and the hue of the face as it was turned to the ceiling told that the man was dead!

CHAPTER III.

JAVERT'S NEW CASE.

JACK JAVERT, the detective, prepared immediately to follow Lucy Lemon's exit from his office; but he was unexpectedly delayed by a countryman, who had been robbed the night before, and who wanted him to devote much of his valuable time to the recovery of a watch worth probably ten dollars.

The unfortunate greenhorn insisted on pouring the entire story of his misfortune into Jack's ears.

The detective listened through it all though he was all the time in a torture-box.

"So Juliette Jansen was unfortunate last night," he murmured, with the countryman off his hands at last, and himself in a car, bound for the scene of the strange occurrence related by Lucy. "Juliette is a peculiar character, and a little mysterious, too. Maybe one of her visitors robbed her, but I do not understand the man lying under the piano. Lucy's eyes could not have deceived her; they look too bright for that."

It was not long before the detective alighted in the vicinity of the house he was to visit. He did not know what had become of the girl though he had not forgotten her engagement in the Park the coming night.

The hour was still early, but his presence in the neighborhood seemed to occasion no surprise.

He went straight from the car to Madame

Jansen's abode, and soon found himself in a cool and darkened parlor in one corner of which stood an elegant piano.

Jack Javert had reached the conclusion that he was in the room mentioned by the girl when a voice came in over the open transom.

"Remember I am engaged, Mariette," said the voice. "Don't admit anybody till the gentleman leaves. Meet every caller on the steps and say 'no' decisively."

The next moment footsteps came toward the door, accompanied by the rustle of skirts and when it opened on its silent hinges the independent shadow saw before him the woman who had summoned him to the house.

The light was not strong enough to let him scan her face and figure, but a jeweled hand pushed back a heavy curtain and let in a flood of morning sunshine; then Javert saw that he was confronted by Juliette herself—a queenly-looking woman with a beautiful, though somewhat cold face, expressive brown eyes, and a luxuriant crop of tresses.

Her face broke into smiles when she saw the young man, studying him as it were with all her power.

"I sent for you if you are Jack Javert," said she. "I have a little piece of business for you. I was robbed last night."

The suddenness with which she made the announcement rather startled the other, and before he could ask the usual questions the madam went on:

"I am going to give you all the clew I have, which is not much; but I know you by reputation and I am satisfied that I have not called the wrong man. You detectives don't demand to know your client's history I presume?"

"Not at all, madam, as a rule."

"That is good," seemingly put at her ease by the reply. "I am the victim of a secret conspiracy which is designed to break me down by any means. I have not always lived in New York, as you may know. I have been tracked hither by the villains who are playing a big hand for a purpose which it is not necessary that I should unfold to you. When I awoke this morning somewhat earlier than usual, there was a singular, almost suffocating, odor in my bedroom. It was pungent though not repulsive, notwithstanding the nausea it occasioned. At first my head swam in a fit of giddiness but a breath of fresh air cleared the room and almost instantly restored me.

"I found, and it was the first thing I discovered, that my dressing-table had been carried to the side of my bed. On its polished surface, as you shall see, was a grayish powder, like ashes. It resembled the remains of those little cones known in toy-shops as Pharaoh's Serpents. My first impulse was to spring up and go direct to my jewel-case. I did so. The case itself was where I had left it, but it was unlocked, and a ring and a brooch were gone. The ring is easily described, for there is not to my knowledge another like it in existence. It was of solid gold and the form of a hoop-snake. The scales were perfect. The crest was formed by the serpent's head, the eyes of which were diamonds of the first water. The whole was the work of a brilliant, though unfortunate young lapidary, who was found dead over his finished work some years ago.

"The brooch I barely mention," continued Juliette, with a wave of the hand. "I am nearly at a loss to know why it was taken. It was a simple agate in a plain gold setting. But the ring is the valuable property that was lost. Now to the clew."

Juliette leaned toward the detective and collected her thoughts for a moment.

"When I rushed into the parlor with my brain in a whirl, I stumbled over an object doubled up on the floor," she went on. "The unexpected collision nearly threw me headlong against the wall, but when I recovered, and came back, I discovered that I had fallen over a man. He lay yonder, half-way under the piano, and with all the immobility of one dead. Frightened out of my wits, as you may imagine, I did not know what to do for several seconds, then I went over to the man and let a flood of light fall upon him. To my horror I discovered that he was dead."

"Dead?" echoed Javert.

"Yes. His peculiar position should have told me this at first, but it did not take me long to make the discovery. I called the girl Lucy, who sometimes sleeps in my house, and sent her after you. After her departure, Mariette and I searched the man in the parlor, but found no ring or brooch on the body. Having done this, I called up the patrol, and, just before your arrival, the body was taken to the morgue with the statement that I knew nothing of the man beyond the fact that he was found dead in my house, which was true. The stranger was a dwarf, Captain Javert—one of those freaks of nature which we see occasionally nowadays. His arms were very long, like those of a large ape. When he stood erect they must have reached to his knees. I should think he was an agile climber; however, he looked to be so."

"How did you find your doors when you looked?" inquired the detective.

"Locked—all of them," was the prompt response. "The person who robbed me locked every door behind him as he went out. The dead dwarf had no keys on his body. I have nothing left to show you but the ashes of the pastille on my dressing stand. The morgue will show you my dead guest."

Juliette parted the heavy curtains which separated her boudoir from the parlor, and Javert leaned over the strange relic of the mysterious robbery.

This was nothing but a little heap of grayish ashes. Dipping his finger into it, he raised it to his face and tried to extract some odor from the ash, but he failed to do so, and the woman, who was watching him all the time, exclaimed:

"The smell has departed, captain. The ashes will give you no clew. The morgue might do better."

"We will see," answered Javert, with a smile. "I think I shall become interested in this case."

"I hope so."

"Do you profess to see in this piece of work the hand of your foes?"

The madam started.

"I think I do; but the rest is your own work. You are to track the robber down; you are to drop the ring into my hand when I hold it out to you. But first I must have your oath."

"My oath?"

"Nothing else, Captain Javert."

Jack drew back and looked at the woman, who was so strangely commanding in his presence.

"I know this is an unusual proceeding," she went on. "I am a peculiar woman. I will have no unleashed hound on a trail of mine. You must swear to serve no one while you serve me, and to betray nothing which you may discover while on the trail."

"Is that what you require?"

"Yes."

An uncontrollable desire seized the detective.

"Repeat the oath!" said he, raising his right hand.

"Then you will take it!"

"If you will be content with nothing less."

"I will not."

The brown eyes of Madam Jansen seemed to turn to black while she swore into her service the young detective, and when Javert's arm dropped again at his side, she had achieved her triumph.

"You may see strange things on this trail," she remarked. "There will be by-paths to tempt you off, but the main trail is what you are to stick to. A man like I know you to be, need not make a failure of this hunt. If they find out that you are on the scent, you will have snares to meet, and cunning devils to fight. Now, Captain Javert, I have nothing more to say. The case is in your hands."

Five minutes later the silken detective was beyond the house, and on his way to the morgue.

"This case promises both adventure and mystery," he confessed. "I may know something about Lucy Lemon's mistress before I am through."

He was well known at the establishment of the dead by the authorities in charge there, but when he inquired after the man who had been brought in from Madam Jansen's house, he was met with a laugh.

"You've come to the wrong place this time, Jack."

"The wrong place!"

"Yes. It was a case of suspended animation, and, if the fellow isn't at large, you'll find him at the station."

Javert took a long breath, and then laughed with the speaker.

CHAPTER IV. IRONS IN THE FIRE.

"A CASE of suspended animation, eh?" muttered the Independent Detective as he left the morgue and turned toward the police station, where he thought he would be apt to find the strange being in whom he had suddenly become interested. "I can easily see how the case could have deceived Juliette Jansen, for she must have been considerably frightened, but he was not likely to fool a police surgeon long."

The station reached, Javert was met with a smile much like the one by which he had been received at the morgue.

"The man isn't here," assured the lieutenant in charge.

"Not here?"

"That is it exactly."

"Wasn't he brought in from the morgue?"

"No. The patrol wagon started back with him, but, all at once he jumped out and vanished before the boys could clutch him. It was a neat trick."

"A trick?" echoed the detective.

"It was nothing else. The doctor says the man is undoubtedly one of the few who can feign death at will. He was simply exercising his powers."

Jack, not a little nonplussed, went back over the whole ground in thought.

He saw that at the very outset the cleverness of an adroit rogue had baffled him—that, at the threshold of his service for Madam Jansen he

had experienced a stinging disappointment, for he expected to get something out of the dwarf.

Beyond the escape of the prisoner the officer in charge of the station knew nothing. He told the story as it had been reported by the police, and Javert was obliged to be content with it.

The upshot of the affair was that he went back to his office.

As he unlocked the door he heard a rustle of skirts on the steps he had just ascended and, a moment afterward, he stood face to face with a young woman whom he had never met before.

"You are Jackson Javert, the detective, are you not?" she asked in a voice, which, in its eagerness trembled slightly.

The young man bowed and opened his door as an invitation for his visitor to enter.

"I come to you in a time of need—of need and vengeance!" continued the young lady, in whose beautiful young face were fresh lines of sorrow. "You like people to come to the point at once, for you detectives are men of business. Within the last two hours I have been deprived of a father's care and affection. I am the daughter of Ruff Raymont, a gentleman who may not have been unknown to you. He is dead, and I want blood for blood!"

The detective saw the change from white to crimson which came to the speaker's face at this; he saw, too, that the hands were clinched till the transparent nails were almost wounding the flesh.

"They do not know that I am here," she went on. "I have heard of you and I wanted to be the one to put you on the trail. My father met his death by violence, though there is not a mark on his person. He received a visitor this morning—a strange woman whom he ordered the servant to admit despite the earliness of the hour. I did not see her, but Julie marked her well, even to a singular ring which she wore on her hand. I want you to see Julie, though I can give you her testimony word for word. Don't say 'no' to me, Mr. Javert. Remember that I have sworn to devote my life to clearing up the dark mystery that invests my father's death. I have nothing to live for beyond that. All the wealth he left behind—and that is much—is at my command, and I will hold none of it back in my hunt for the slayer. You must come to my assistance. There must be no other cases between you and this one. Say that you are free to help me."

Here was a strange dilemma.

Javert thought of the trail he had already taken up. He lingered again over Juliette and her oath.

"You hesitate, but you will not turn me off!" cried the young girl, whose deep blue eyes were irresistible. "Do not forget that Nora Raymont has been made an orphan by a species of crime which, as yet, is nameless because it is not known. You will find the murderer with the serpent-headed ring on her hand—"

"The serpent-headed ring!" echoed the detective, the words going through him like a knife.

"So Julie calls it," was the response. "She says the crest of the ring had eyes that shone like diamonds; but she will tell you everything."

"At what hour did the visit take place?" asked Javert.

"At six o'clock this morning."

"Your father was in his room?"

"In the library."

"Nothing was overheard?"

"Unfortunately, not a word."

"Who let the unknown out?"

"Julie."

"Did she see the ring then?"

"No; she noticed it when she admitted the caller."

"I will see, Julie," declared the detective, unconsciously speaking his thoughts aloud, and for the moment forgetting that he had sworn to serve but one mistress.

"A thousand thanks! I knew you would not refuse me!" exclaimed the young girl, clasping her hands in gratitude. "Something told me all the time that I would not appeal in vain. Captain Javert, you will win the eternal gratitude of Nora Raymont by championing her cause and helping her to vengeance. I have fulfilled my mission, and now I can go back to the sad duty of watching over the dead."

She held out her hand, which the detective took, holding it for a moment and then dropping it to let her go.

Before she was half-way down the steps his brain was busy.

"What is this?" he ejaculated. "Juliette's great loss is a peculiar ring which she declares had no duplicate, and here one is seen on the hand of the woman who is supposed to have killed Ruff Raymont, the ex-Californian and retired millionaire. I am in Juliette's employ. I am to hunt the ring. She has bound me with an oath to do nothing else. If I am not mistaken, I can serve her while helping Nora Raymont 'to vengeance' as she calls it. Mystery jostles mystery in a manner that beats my blood. Were I to choose I would rather serve the gentle Nora than the cold-blooded but scheming and impulsive Juliette. But, amid all this I must not forget Lucy Lemon and her

walk in the Park to-night. I did not promise her that I would be near, but I am going to see the outcome of her adventure. It would do me good to help the child to the secret of her parentage provided it were honorable. I must not have too many irons in the fire, but I have dealt with double trails before, and I'll try not to lose my head in this maze of mystery."

Not long afterward the detective was introduced to the members of Ruff Raymont's household.

He found things as Nora had briefly described them.

The doctors who had been summoned to the mansion had decided that Raymont had died from suffocation caused by the introduction of some unknown substance into the lungs. Beyond this they knew nothing, and it remained for Julie the maid to forge the first links of a chain of crime.

Julie was ready to tell her story to the smallest particulars when she had the detective for a listener.

She was an observing girl of twenty-two, and when she concluded her narrative Jack Javert had a mental photograph of Raymont's visitor as Julie had seen her.

His visit to the house and his subsequent preparations for the first move took up the best part of the day.

The detective did not see fit to rush things. He had one, if not two, of the deepest cases of detective experience on his hands.

He saw the shadows of night gather over the roofs and towers of New York.

Juliette, no doubt, was waiting for his report, ignorant of the dwarf's sudden return to life, and his subsequent escape.

At that very moment she was wondering why he did not place the serpent-headed ring in her hand, and did not dream that the wheel of fate would turn many times before she should see it again.

A few minutes before eight the detective consulted his watch, and posted away in the direction of Union Square.

He had not forgotten that Lucy Lemon was expected to walk among the trees there, thus accepting the terms of the strange letter whose writer hinted that he could unravel the secret of her birth, and place in her hands a fortune of which she had been wrongfully deprived.

The sweet face of the young girl had impressed its image on Jack Javert's heart. More than once he had seen her enter and emerge from Juliette Jansen's house, and he knew Juliette better than most of her neighbors did.

Again and again he had asked himself why had Juliette taken up with the girl of unknown parentage, when she had Mariette to obey her slightest wish. He had found the problem insoluble.

Now that the girl had brought him a message from Juliette, his interest in her had received fresh impetus, and with that keen reasoning which seems to come natural to the ferrets of crime, he was already connecting Lucy with the mystery before him.

"Somewhere in all this maze of murder and robbery, lies justice for Lucy Lemon as well as vengeance for Nora Raymont," he would say again and again.

It was dark when he reached the Square.

The many lamps were throwing their light among the trees which had not yet put on their spring vestments, and here and there pedestrians were moving across the plot.

Javert at once began to look for Lucy.

It was now fully the hour suggested by the author of the letter, and something ought to be seen.

Presently the figure of the girl came in sight. She tried to appear unconcerned, though Javert detected considerable excitement in her manner.

He stepped back lest she should recognize him, and in a moment she had passed by.

Almost immediately there glided past him a figure that had a cat-like tread. It was low and agile. The hat was pulled over the eyes which Javert could not see, but for all this, he received a shock which sent a thrill through his frame.

The man—for man the figure was—sprung swiftly after the girl, and Javert saw Lucy halt as a hand fell on her shoulder, and a cry escaped her and drove her back, for she undoubtedly faced the long-armed dwarf!

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN PYGMY AND SHADOW.

JAVERT had unexpectedly found the man for whom he had been looking—the person who had feigned death so well in Juliette's house and afterward escaped from the police!

He was anxious to know if this was the "Fortune" of Lucy's mysterious letter, for, having found the dwarf keeping an appointment, as it were, with the girl, he was resolved to get to the bottom of the adventure.

For a second the girl threatened to run off and leave the little man to himself; but her flight, even if seriously contemplated, was checked by the closing of the hand that had dropped upon her shoulder, and the dwarf leaned forward with a leer of satisfaction in his eyes.

"You are a good girl," said he. "It is just eight o'clock, and you are here."

"Yes, I thought it best to answer your letter by coming hither myself."

"My letter?" laughed man. "Do you think it was mine, child?"

Lucy colored.

"If not yours, why are you here?" she asked. He did not reply.

"So you want to see me!" continued Lucy, who more than once had looked around in search of a figure which she could recognize as Javert's.

"I would not be here if I did not want to talk with you," responded the dwarf. "You are at a loss how to address me when you speak. My name is not 'Fortune' which was the signature to the letter as you well remember. You may call me Captain Pygmy, for want of a better name. It suits my size, though I don't look very well in a military title. Whither shall we go? Is it too cold on the benches here?"

Lucy who wanted the detective to hear all he could if he was near, said that, if Captain Pygmy did not object, the Park would suit her very well for their talk. She could not stay long as she might be wanted by Mrs. Jansen at any time.

At mention of Juliette's name Captain Pygmy's eyes seemed to get new light, and he led the girl to one of the settees which, resting against a tree, was pretty well screened from observation.

Jack had witnessed all this, though he had not been able to catch every word. He now took up a position near the settee and prepared to listen.

For a little while the dwarf regarded the girl with curious eyes, then he caught her wrist and squeezed it as he cried:

"You look like him; I swear you do!"

"Like whom?" asked Lucy, though there was a name struggling for utterance on her lips.

"Ah! let it go," said the Pygmy, dropping her hand and drawing back. "We will talk about something else first."

"Go on."

Lucy found herself forced to content herself with anything she could get.

"When did you first see Juliette?" asked the man.

The girl thought for a moment.

"It was two years ago, I think."

"How old are you now, Lucy?"

"As near as I can tell, I am nearly fifteen."

"Did you ever ask Juliette?"

"No. Why should I?"

She looked up into Captain Pygmy's face for a moment, and caught his eye.

"Are you much at Juliette's house?" he went on without taking notice of her question.

"I am there often."

"And you see a good deal?"

"I see some things. I cannot help it, you know."

He nodded.

"What about Juliette's visitors?"

"She has some."

"Yes, yes. Does the large man come any more?"

"The large man?" echoed the girl.

"Ah! you must have seen him."

"What is he like?"

"He has dark hair, a full figure and a mustache that drops over his mouth."

"Oh! you mean Mr. Raymont!" exclaimed Lucy.

"Do you know him by that name?"

Lucy Lemon seemed to shrink from him, and Captain Pygmy saw that, in her own estimation, she had made a mistake.

"Yes, I mean Raymont," he responded, before she could apologize or explain. "Does he come any more?"

"He has not been to the house for some time."

"When he comes, do they quarrel?"

Lucy looked at him without answer.

"If you want the secret and the fortune, girl, you must talk out," he urged. "You can trust Captain Pygmy to the uttermost. This is a case with thousands in it—for you, at least. I hold in my hand more than they think. Now, do they quarrel? You keep your ears open, I know."

"I have heard them have words in the parlor."

"Hot words, eh?"

"They grew loud at times."

"I thought so. What did they say?"

"You ask too much now, for I do not remember," answered the girl. "You see I did not expect to meet you here."

"Of course not. After Raymont goes away, does Juliette show any excitement?"

"She is nervous, but as she shuts herself up in her room, I do not get to see anything of her."

He was silent for a moment, during which time the girl caught sight of a man near by whom she thought must be Jack the shadow.

"Did anything happen in Juliette's house last night?" he suddenly asked.

"She says she was robbed."

"Robbed, hey?" cried Captain Pygmy. "And pray, what did my lady Juliette lose?"

"She did not tell me all," responded Lucy, "but she claims to have lost a good deal."

"Jewelry, eh?"

"I know of a ring."

"Ho! that's a trifle, nowadays, though it may be something in Juliette's eyes. Well, whom has she put on the scent?"

Lucy wondered if the man standing a few feet away wanted her to tell of her errand for Juliette to the detective's office, but his last words with her—"Get all out of the man you can"—seemed to assure her that she need conceal nothing!

She evidently thought that her friend Javert was able to cope with any one, and by saying that he was Juliette's sleuth might reveal the true motives of Captain Pygmy.

"Juliette is not slow to act," said she. "She has already put a detective named Javert on the trail."

"The Broadway shadow, eh?" exclaimed the dwarf. "Has he called at the house?"

"He has been there."

"What does he say about the case?"

"I do not know."

"Javert—Javert!" muttered Captain Pygmy. "I know something of him. He may interfere with our fortune if he stays in Juliette's service. I don't like these shadows, and I reckon I have cause for hating them."

"Now, my child, I want to repeat a part of the letter you received. Eyes and ears are to be kept open night and day. You want to see a certain secret unfold; you want to know something about your life mystery. There is but one path to it, and that leads by Captain Pygmy."

Lucy could not suppress the cry that bubbled to her lips.

"You know the secret then? You know who I am?" she demanded.

"Did I say so, girl?"

"No, but—"

"I may talk by and by," he interrupted. "But it will surely come if you serve me well. I know more than they think I do."

"Is my father dead?" eagerly asked the girl.

"Do you think he is?"

"Ah! I hardly know what to think. More than once I have conjectured till my brain whirled. I want to know who I am. It is a terrible thing to go nameless through the world. It is torture which one can hardly endure and live. I am willing to do almost anything to establish my identity. I want to know about my parents. I want to see them if they are living. You say that the secret can be mine if I serve you. What is it you want me to do?"

It was an appeal to which Captain Pygmy listened with a smile on his lips.

"You want to do this: Go back to Juliette. Keep eyes and ears open more than ever before; find out whom she suspects of the robbery; overhear the detective's reports when he makes them. Come here to-morrow night, and tell me all you know. I am Captain Pygmy for a purpose, and it is closely connected with your interests. You will get your own and know the secret if you serve me, child. This is a game I've wanted to see fairly under way a long time. Ah! Juliette is a shrewd one. She can play lamb and tigress in the same act if it suits her purpose. I've seen her play them before. But, by the way, does she ever have visitors of her own sex?"

"Not often."

"That's one point," replied Pygmy. "Who gave you the name you bear?"

"I don't know."

"Does Juliette always call you Lucy?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever catch her looking strangely at you?"

"More than once, Captain Pygmy."

"At night?"

"Yes."

"In her house?"

"In her house."

"Juliette has pretty eyes, eh, girl?"

"I think so."

"Her mother had before her, but they are dangerous eyes. The family eye has lured more than one victim to the deadly rocks of fate. They're at work again for the same purpose. But don't let me run on at this rate. You will stand by me, Lucy?"

He took the girl's hand and held it while he spoke.

Lucy glanced to the right and saw the detective still on duty.

She could not escape the dwarf's question. It had to be met and firmly, too. Her decision might involve all her future happiness, but it promised to help her to the solution of the mystery of her life.

"I will help you," said she, catching Captain Pygmy's eye.

"I knew you would!" he exclaimed. "Now I will make up for the past. Now I will shut my hand and crush somebody!"

"Will that somebody be Juliette?" asked Lucy.

"If she stands in my way, yes!" was the quick reply. "I am a crusher if I am not a giant. Because I am small and misshapen"—and he held out his long, ape-like arms so that the girl could see them, "I am not a weakling."

Serve me—do my bidding, Lucy, and by the eternal heavens I'll give you name and fortune. Keep track of this detective in any way you can. Play spy when he comes to Juliette's house, and when Raymont calls don't let him be out of your sight for a second. A spy in Juliette's house! By Jove! I am armed now! Tomorrow night at eight again meet me here! Fail and lose all, girl. Serve me and win!"

He sprung up, gave the speechless Lucy a wild look and vanished in a twinkling.

"In mercy's name, what sort of master have I now?" exclaimed Lucy. "What will Javert say to this?"

She started toward the spot where she had seen the detective last, but he was gone.

He was already Captain Pygmy's shadow.

CHAPTER VI.

A LIGHTNING BOLT.

If unaware that he had a tireless sleuth at his heels in the person of Jack Javert, Captain Pygmy performed some very singular evolutions.

Although night had taken full possession of the city, he dodged in and out among the shadows as if trying to escape some one, and his movements which were quick and nimble promised to baffle Javert.

Lucy had turned her steps toward Madam Juliette's.

The girl's head was full of strange and exciting thoughts, and while she made her way through the streets with a shawl drawn over her head for concealment, she wondered what would be the outcome of her night adventure.

Javert, however, was not to be outwitted by the man whom he followed with pertinacity.

He had shadowed human game before, and was not going to let this one escape.

It was some time after Captain Pygmy's separation from Lucy in the Square before he halted, or indicated in any manner that the detective's chase had ended.

He plunged into a rickety-looking frame, whose second story windows overlooked the lamplit waters of the widening river and bay.

"The fox's hole!" decided Javert. "A long chase, Captain Pygmy, but I have run you down at last. Now are you alone in this game, or does some sharer of your secret inhabit the old house? I'll try to answer this question at another time. I'm satisfied with having tracked you to the den. Good-night, captain! One of these times you will play dead for the wrong party."

Javert turned back.

As he had said, he was satisfied with what he had done. He had another play in view.

"Now for the woman who is thought to have finished Raymont in some mysterious manner. Captain Pygmy seems to treat lightly Juliette's loss of the serpent-headed ring, yet, at the same time, Lucy is to watch me, who have promised to find the thief for her mistress! What makes the dwarf so eager? And he was found in Juliette's house yesterday morning and was sent to the morgue for dead! I see I've got my hands full."

The detective at last ended his long tramp and entered his office, closing the door softly behind him.

"I'm glad you've come," said a voice as the gas flashed up, and with a start Javert looked around at a very unlooked-for tenant.

He was confronted by a young girl of nineteen, with bright black eyes and a clear complexion.

She occupied one of the office chairs and was looking at him with a smile for his surprise.

"Don't you know me?" she continued. "I am Mariette, Mr. Raymont's maid."

"Yes, I know you, but I am not right sure how you got in."

"By the door, to be sure," laughed the girl. "I knocked and got no reply, then I tried the knob and lo! the door opened."

"It was not locked, then?"

"It was not. I thought that you had just gone out for a few moments; so I concluded to wait."

"How long have you been here, Mariette?"

"Perhaps an hour."

"And you want to see me?"

"I do."

"Did you forget to tell me something connected with the mysterious woman?"

"Not so much about her as about the dead man—Ruff Raymont."

"Well, go ahead, Mariette."

The girl, who was not past twenty, settled back into the chair and remained silent for a second.

"I was in his private room this evening. It is not the library where the fatal interview took place, but a small apartment on the floor above, where I never was before. Sometimes Mr. Raymont would repair to this room and remain there nearly a whole day at a time. When he came out he would look pale and sometimes he would seem to tremble. I always had a curiosity to enter this Bluebeard-like closet, and this evening my eagerness got and kept the upper hand."

Mariette's right hand disappeared among the folds of her gown, followed by the detective's eye.

When it came forth it held a small packet which was extended toward Javert, who took it with an inquisitive look at the girl.

"From the look of the private chamber," resumed Mariette, "Mr. Raymont must have been disturbed at his desk by the entrance of the strange visitor below. Nobody, not even Nora, seems to have thought of the room above, therefore I found it in the state left by him for the last time. In the open desk lay this packet, and I would not have touched it if I had not seen on the topmost paper a name which struck me peculiarly. See what you think of my find, Captain Javert."

The detective turned to the papers which were tied with a bit of plain cord.

"Did you tie these up?" he asked.

"Yes. They were slightly loose in the desk."

"Did you lock them through?"

"Partly," was the prompt confession. "You know a woman's curiosity. I am troubled with more than my share of it, I think. I looked at the top paper because of the name I had seen."

By this time detective Jack had opened the packet and his hands had already unfolded a paper headed:

"Memoranda of Agreement between me and Captain Cinnabar and others."

Below this followed the words:

"Camp Satan, June 3d, 1867."

"Twenty years ago," murmured Javert over the date, and then he caught Mariette's eye:

"Was it the name of Captain Cinnabar that struck you?" asked he.

"It was."

"What do you know about him?"

"He calls sometimes at Raymont's house."

"Have you seen him?"

"Often."

"What is the captain like?"

"He is tall and straight, with a dark-brown skin, long black hair, eagle-like eyes, and has a hand with one finger missing."

"You are a close observer, Mariette," smiled Javert.

"The man engaged my attention the first time he called. I think he is in love with Nora."

"Your young mistress, eh? Did she ever say so?"

"No, sir, but I have eyes, you see, captain."

"So you have, and good ones, too. Now, let me look over the dead man's notes."

The young shadower spread the paper out before him and began to decipher the hastily-written manuscript.

Once he looked up, a gleam of victory and astonishment in his eyes, but Mariette had ceased to watch him, and he went back to his task without remark or comment.

"Did you read this all through, Mariette?" he asked when he had finished.

"I did."

"Then you possess a secret. Don't you think so?"

The girl colored.

"Yes, that paper holds a deep, dark secret. Ruff Raymont was once a mine king, a gold-camp boss in the Wild West. He drew about him men of desperate character, of whom Captain Cinnabar was leader."

"That is true."

"The notes are plain on that score," she continued. "But, that agreement between Raymont and the men provided for the commission of a crime. What are they to do, Captain Javert? You have read the paper carefully. A human life stood in Raymont's way then—twenty years ago. Even then there was a woman in his road, and he found her there a few hours since."

"The same woman, Mariette?"

"I do not know," answered the girl, shaking her head. "Twenty years ago Captain Cinnabar agreed to find Raymont's pest and silence her. Those notes make this very plain. Now, did the captain carry out his part of the covenant?"

"We must find out!"

"We?" echoed Mariette with a smile. "That is your work. Remember, I am not in this case. You are Nora's sleuth-bound, as she calls you. She expects you to find the mysterious caller and to prove that, by some means, she killed her father. Nora wants vengeance. She does not dream that her father ever had a compact with Captain Cinnabar, or Xerxes, or Monte. Do you see that a drama, begun in California, has, by some means, been transferred to New York?"

"I have a mind to take you in with me and make a female shadow out of you!" exclaimed Javert.

"No! I will not assent!" was the retort. "I am already too much mixed up in this mystery. You will let me go back now? Keep the papers if you wish. Their owner is dead, and Nora knows nothing of their existence."

"I want them, so will retain them," said the detective.

He accompanied the maid down the stairs to the sidewalk.

"Has Captain Cinnabar, or the man known as such, called since the tragedy?" he asked.

"No."

"Where does he live?"

"He did occupy a house on N— street."

"When?"
"Six months ago."
"Do you know the number?"
"666."

"And Monte and Xerxes?"
"I know nothing about their quarters."
Javert watched the girl glide away until she disappeared, then he ran up-stairs, locked up the documents so unexpectedly placed in his hands, and left the building.

"Don't fret, Juliette," he exclaimed, thinking of Miss Jansen, whose sworn employee he was; "all this will bring me back to your thief and we'll get back to the trail of the serpent-headed ring in good time."

Half an hour later a figure very like Detective Javert's appeared in a certain quarter of the city. It moved leisurely up a rather quiet street looking more than casually at the house on the right.

"Here it is—666," said the man at last. "The place seems to be empty. Captain Cinnabar may have left long ago, but we will see."

Javert noticed that the shutters of the house, a narrow, old-fashioned frame, were closely drawn, but this did not deter him. Approaching closer, he gained the window to the left of the door.

Beyond the slats of the shutters he saw a light.

"Inhabited, eh?" he exclaimed. "I think that, with Mariette's aid, I have picked up an important link of the chain. Let me find Captain Cinnabar and his pards and I'll solve the mystery I have in hand."

At the same time his hands touched the window sill.

It was rounding and as sleek as polished brass. "What means this?" passed through the shadower's mind at the touch.

The next instant, to his horror, he found out.

Without warning an electric bolt seemed to pass through his arms into his body. He tried to shout, but the effort died on his lips, and, all at once he staggered back from the house, and dropped like one dead in the gutter!

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN TO LIFE.

"Go out and look at the victim."
"Did you catch somebody?"
"Go and see."

These words passed between the two men, who, at the time, occupied a room just beyond the window from which young Javert, the detective, had staggered like a person mortally struck by an electric current.

The man who gave the command stood between a table and the wall with one of his hands resting on the latter, and near a dark spot not much larger than a silver half-dime.

He was a handsome fellow, with an admirable physique, and animated, dark eyes, and a profusion of raven hair.

As he stood there, in the light, a smile of triumph on his dark face, he looked like some prince of the plains transported to New York.

His eyes were still fastened on the window before him, and when the person to whom he had spoken had left the room, he dropped into a chair at the table.

"The moment the spy touched the conductor on the sill I knew I had him," he said to himself. "I know how to clear the way as I go along, and I am not going to let the spies of Gotham beat the men of the West. Monte will find some victim out there, but whom? I shall know, in a moment, for I am sure the bolt did not fail me. It never does."

He did not have to wait long, for a report from the outside.

The door at one side of the room opened, and the face of the man sent out appeared.

"There's a body in the gutter," was the report.

"Is the coast clear?"
"I saw no one."
"Bring the victim in."

The face at the door disappeared, and the man in the room took certain papers from the table and tossed them into an opening which the touching of a button had revealed in the wall.

Then he took up a cigar and waited for the body of his victim.

Presently the door opened again, and Monte came staggering in with the limp form of a man in his arms.

"By Jove! you have him, sure enough!" cried the Wild West-looking personage, gazing eagerly forward, with eyes distended with curiosity and satisfaction. "I did not have full power on, therefore the man may not be dead, Monte."

"I don't think he is, sir."

"Hal put him on the sofa yonder and let us see."

Monte carried his burden across the room and placed it as designated. Already the handsome man was bending over it, and the assistant stood by, watching both alternately.

"You are right, Monte; there is life here!" suddenly said the chief of the twain. "The shock sent him into the gutter, did it? Full force would have thrown him half-way across the street."

Monte said nothing, but watched the unconscious occupant of the sofa.

"Do you know him, Monte?" was the sudden question.

"No, captain."
"Are you sure you have never seen him before?"

"One is sure of nothing nowadays."
"That is your belief; but we are sure of coming out ahead in our game. Doesn't this prove it? A spy comes to the window. He is looking into our nest when I touch the electric button, and snap! he tumbles back, his work done where it had just commenced! Nothing sure, eh, Monte? Look at our victim."

The speaker again bent over the body on the sofa, and his deft hands began to go through the detective's pockets.

There was, of course, no resistance to these proceedings, and the slightest signs of life were all that were noticeable about the stricken man.

The search brought to light several cards and a memorandum, which the searcher held up with a smile of triumph to his companion.

"This proves all we want!" said he, separating one of the cards and handing it to Monte.

The card started at the inscription on the bit of Bristol board, and then looked at the victim of the shock.

"He is Jack Javert, the best young sleuth in Gotham!" he exclaimed. "I've heard of him more than once since we came here, but this is my first sight of him. By Jove! Captain Cinnabar, our trap could not have caught a more important victim."

"It is a splendid catch, Monte. It excels some we used to have in the mountains; but we don't catch men here as we did there."

"What shall we do with him?" asked Monte, disturbing the silence which followed the last remark.

"Wait a moment. I want to go slow now. The enemy is not dead though he hasn't the slightest conception of his whereabouts. We must not rush to conclusions with a person like Javert the detective, alive, and in our hands. We do not know who put him onto us; but he came and found us here."

Captain Cinnabar went back to the table from which he watched the man on the sofa while he wrestled with the problem which had come up.

All at once he sprung up and took from a close cupboard across the room a very handsome electric battery.

"Can you carry him again, Monte?" he asked the waiting man as he tucked the box under his arm.

Monte, who was as well built as Captain Cinnabar, placed his arms under the detective and lifted him with ease.

"Which way?" he asked, looking at his master.

"Follow me." Captain Cinnabar led off, followed by Monte and his burden.

Beyond the door the men descended a flight of steps which terminated on a stone floor and in a room that resembled a circular dungeon.

Directly opposite the steps, and on the bare stones, Monte deposited his load, and Captain Cinnabar leaned forward with the box.

"Blindfold him, Monte."

In a little while the eyes of the victim were entirely covered by a tight black bandage, after which performance Captain Cinnabar commanded his helper to depart.

The dark-lantern, which Cinnabar had hung on a hook by the door, illuminated the narrow room to a certain distance above the floor. Beyond this all was dark.

When he found himself alone with the detective, Captain Cinnabar took a mask from his pocket and carefully adjusted it, then he opened the battery and set it going.

In a second he had applied a small oval-shaped object to Javert's wrist, and, as the battery whirred, he turned his attention to the sleuth's face.

"I'm bringing him back!" cried he as he caught sight of the twitching lips and other signs of a return to consciousness. "A hair from the dog's back is said to be good for the bite, I'll make electricity part the lips of its victim. At any time I can silence him forever. I want to know who put him on the trail, and in whose employ he is just now. I already know whose trap holds him; but that is not enough."

The effects of the battery became more and more apparent, and Captain Cinnabar removed the electric conductor at last and leaning over his victim called out:

"Jackson Javert!"

In an instant the detective's head turned to one side, and the whole power of the man seemed to be bent on listening.

Captain Cinnabar repeated the name with emphasis.

"Who calls me?" asked Jack.

A smile of delight stole over Cinnabar's sallow face.

"A friend of course, Jack," he answered with cool familiarity which he knew so well how to assume.

"Where am I and why is it so dark?"

"It is dark because your eyes are bandaged for your own good, and you are not in the gutter where you were found."

"Aha! the gutter!" cried Jack. "My whole

body seems full of electric needles, but I am able to think again. That infernal sill was charged with death."

Captain Cinnabar grinned.

"What window sill?"

"The one I touched," was the reply.

"And where was it?"

Detective Jack seemed to catch himself before he spoke again.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"Yes, we know you!" repeated Cinnabar.

"Yes; you are Javert, the Independent Detective. It seems that you ran against some obstruction for which you were not quite prepared."

"So I did."

"You were on one of your trails."

"I was," and then the lips still ashen and almost bloodless, met firmly once more. "Help me up and take the rag from my eyes. I don't care whose orders it is that it shall stay there. You call yourself my friend. Am I in the hospital? Or have I fallen into the hands of the man who caught me?"

Javert tried to rise while he talked, but the hand of Captain Cinnabar pushed him back.

"In a moment," said he. "You shall have your way if you will only keep quiet ten seconds."

"Make them short ones," retorted Jack, settling back again.

Cinnabar picked up his little box and the lantern, and drew toward the door, whose knob he touched by putting one hand behind him.

"He is a thoroughbred," he muttered, looking at the young man. "Javert has gone as far as I can drag him out. I need not waste time with him; but I will take good care that he does not resume the trail he was on when we caught him. Maybe he was after the person who struck Raymond down. I'll attend to that myself, if it needs attention. Good-by, Jack Javert. You pass this night and from where you are now, forever from your trials and triumphs. The grip of Captain Cinnabar never relaxes. It is the same merciless clutch in New York that it was in Camp Satan and elsewhere. Farewell, my trapped shadow!"

The door opened and closed, and the light and the man were gone.

In a second Javert was on his feet.

"A door shut!" he exclaimed, tearing the bandage from his eyes, and then, when he found himself in in Stygian darkness, he finished with:

"In the name of Heaven, where am I?"

CHAPTER VIII.

PYGMY AND CINNABAR.

The next day, with more haste than was, perhaps, necessary, the remains of Ruff Raymond were taken to the cemetery and left in charge of the sexton. Notwithstanding the wealth he was known to possess, but few people followed the hearse.

If Javert had been at liberty he would have been found with or near the funeral cortege, but he was not there, and those present did not have eyes as sharp as the detective's.

The papers, always eager to get at the sensational, bad, in some inexplicable manner, failed to dwell at length on Raymond's death.

Nora insisted that her father had been subject to fainting spells, and refused to place the matter in the hands of the police.

The girl had given the mystery to young Javert, and was content to let it rest in his hands alone. She did not want, she told Mariette, the maid, a dozen jealous detectives fighting for success over her father's grave.

She had confidence in Javert and believed that his acumen would solve the puzzle and put her on the road to vengeance.

It had already become an open secret between Nora and Mariette that the veiled caller—the wearer of the serpent-headed ring—was responsible for Raymond's death, but the two girls could not discover why she was his enemy.

It was after the funeral and the lamps of Gotham were once more lighting the dark places.

Mariette was the sole occupant of the house, for Nora, eager to know what Javert had done, had gone down to the little up-stairs office for news.

She found it closed and the door locked.

There was a sense of deep failure about the place and as Nora turned away she felt for the first time since the tragedy that the clew to the mystery might always remain undiscovered.

"I will walk a part of the way home," she decided when upon the sidewalk again. "I can think as well while walking as in the car. Besides, I will not be stared at so much on the sidewalk, and that is a good deal to me, just now."

Nora did not see the pair of eyes that were already fixed upon her. If she had looked she might not have found them, but they were near just the same, and she was under a surveillance which would have frightened her.

Starting off briskly she turned the first corner and in a few moments reached Union Square.

It was striking eight in the March air when she left the sidewalk to cut across the Park.

She was sure no one knew her, and a thought

of seeing any people whom she should recognize did not once enter her mind.

But, all at once, Nora almost came to a halt. An exclamation of astonishment bubbled to her lips.

A figure had just risen from one of the numerous benches, and one which was nearly in her path.

There was about this figure enough to cause one to remember it after having seen it once. The body itself was well formed but the legs were short, the arms unusually long and the head quite large.

"That," said Nora under breath while watching the strange creature. "Certainly that is the man I found crouching in the hallway one night nearly a year ago! Yes, it must be the same, for the world cannot possess a duplicate of such a man-ape."

The maiden saw that she had not been noticed and was glad to push on, eager as she was to escape recognition; but, as if to frustrate her design, the man turned upon her, and seemed to look her through.

Nora pretended not to see the act, and quickened her steps.

He stepped aside to let her pass.

"Thanks!" she murmured. "This is more than I expected. He cannot have recognized me, and I will let him have the Park to himself."

"Don't I know you, my fine bird? Ah! it takes a sharper person than you are to escape the keen eyes of Captain Pygmy. Going home, are you?—back to the nest which has been robbery of the male bird. Well, I have business here, just now; but I'll see you and your money later. Yes, Nora, when I've got my web finished, I'll show you what a thoroughbred spider can do!"

Nora by this time was just vanishing toward the other side of the Square, when Captain Pygmy's restless gaze alighted on a figure that took him forward, and suddenly his hand was on a young girl's arm.

"You do keep your word, don't you, my child?" he laughed. "The clocks have just struck eight and here you are as bright as a dollar."

"Yes, I am here because I said I would come," was the answer, and Captain Pygmy drew the girl to the nearest bench.

"Well, has my friend Juliette recovered her ring?" he asked, eagerly.

Lucy Lemon shook her head.

"What has our detective, Mr. Javert, been doing that he has not found the ring?" cried the man. "What does he report to your mistress?"

"He has made no report; I am sure the detective has not called since Madam Juliette put him on the track as well as she could."

"Wasn't he to report often?" he asked, uneasily.

"I thought so."

"Very well," he went on, rubbing his hands. "We will have to wait, but, I don't see why Javert hasn't called since. Can it be that he is on the trail?"

Lucy made no reply.

"But what does Juliette say?" he demanded.

"She keeps her own counsels."

"She does, eh? Juliette always did that," he added, as if addressing no one but himself. "These women who share their thoughts with no one are the dangerous ones. I may have said before, my child, that Juliette, on this account, is dangerous."

"I never thought her so."

"No, because she has been kind to you. She may be playing lamb in your estimation, just now. Wait till you see her play tigress. Does Juliette know that one of her callers is dead?" he asked.

"If you mean Raymond, Juliette knows."

"Well, what does she say about that, child?"

"She threw the paper down with a singular cry, and rushed up-stairs, which was the last I saw of her for six hours."

"It gave her a shock, eh?" exclaimed the man. "Juliette wouldn't have been shocked by the news some years ago. I should say *not!*"

Lucy looked at Pygmy, but offered no remark.

"You haven't found out much since I left you here; still it helps us on," he continued. "I think you will do better within the next twenty-four hours. The agent will certainly report within that space of time. Juliette will not be satisfied if he does not. My advice again is, keep eyes and ears open. Stick to Juliette like a leech, child. Therein lies your future—the secret and the fortune!"

An exchange of good-nights followed, and Lucy, glad to get rid of those piercing eyes and glistening teeth, turned awry.

As she left, the man's eyes seemed to be watching her with a keenness not affected by distance.

"I've got the cords, nearly all of them at least, in my hands," chuckled Captain Pygmy. "I want to know who robbed Juliette, and who killed Raymond—for killed he was. I don't care what the doctors say—and then I'll draw in my net. Then, too, my cool gamblers of the gold coast and the rushing city—then Captain Pygmy will play the most tremendous hand ever seen on this continent. No sleuth shall interfere."

No Javert, with all his bloodhound abilities, shall snatch from me the prize I am after. I've got the web almost finished. A few more threads and I am done. The webs I weave hold. I'm not big in stature, but in cunning and strength—ye gods!"

His step was as full of elasticity as his eye was of fire as he walked away.

On the nearest sidewalk he joined the surging crowd that flowed under the lamps, and pushed on with his hands buried in the depths of pockets that seemed to reach to his knees.

He did not see the huge, panther-like figure bearing down upon him like a pirate craft on the trail of a merchantman.

His ears might have been keen, but they did not hear the tread of the giant at his heels.

Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, a hand-grip on the shoulder was followed by the cry:

"My God! You?"

"Yes, my lizard! Whom did you expect to see?" was the response. "I thought we finished you on the other side of the continent, but you have more lives than a cat. Come along, with a still tongue and motionless hands. Ha! you know me, I see! Well, you'll find me the same Captain Cinnabar I used to be. And I have the same grip, too!"

Captain Pygmy made no reply. Strong as he was, in the clutches of his enemy he seemed but a child; but for all this he had not by any means given up the battle.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIDER CAUGHT.

THE man-ape in the grip of Cinnabar might have called for the police and thus precipitated a rescue, for his captor would not have crossed arms with the guardians of the city, but the fact that he did not, showed that he feared the hand now upon his arm.

The two men, eying each other like hawks, disappeared down one of the side streets running off from the vicinity of Union Square. Captain Cinnabar seemed to know where he was going if his prisoner did not.

Suddenly, a figure, darting from a doorway as it were, stopped before the two, and the big man pushed the dwarf toward the stranger.

"A bird in the net," explained Captain Cinnabar, as the unknown caught sight of the dwarf, and in a moment Captain Pygmy had another hand on him.

Once it was in his head to attempt to jerk from the two, but another idea that promised better results entered his mind.

All at once he turned his eyes on the unknown, who was Monte, already somewhat known to the reader, and his look began to assume an aspect which drew Monte's attention.

At the same time Captain Pygmy's body began to sink, and suddenly his head fell back as the mouth opened with a gasp.

Monte loosened his grip, and looked at Captain Cinnabar.

"The man is dead!" he exclaimed, a look of horror settling over his face as he drew back.

A sarcastic smile came at once to Cinnabar's lips.

"Dead?" he laughed, leaning over the apparently inanimate form of Captain Pygmy whose entire weight was hanging on his hand. "Have you forgotten, Monte, the premature burial we once had in the Sierras?"

"No, captain. But this man is dead for certain."

"As dead now as he was then—nothing more," was the answer. "I think I know about all the tricks this lizard is capable of playing. Here, lend me a hand and we will see whether the rascally spirit of Captain Pygmy has secured a divorce from the body. No go and get a cab. Have it come here at once. I can take care of this corpse till you return."

Monte darted away like a person eager to get off, and Captain Cinnabar was left alone with the man-ape of Gotham.

"It's a clever trick, but it can't fool an old bird," he suddenly said, his lips almost touching Captain Pygmy's ears. "I would as soon have you dead as alive, so it is but little difference to me, you see."

There was not the slightest outward sign that the dwarf heard a word of this, for not a muscle moved, and the face which had already assumed an ashen pallor which was an admirable counterfeit of death, was as immovable as the face of a statue.

Monte was not gone long. He soon came back with the rumble of cab and wheels behind him, and he stopped near Captain Cinnabar and his charge and showed the driver where to drive.

Captain Pygmy was placed inside by Cinnabar alone, and the vehicle containing three persons rattled out of the narrow by-street and into a more pretentious thoroughfare.

The dwarf had been placed in one corner of the cab, with his face turned to Cinnabar and Monte on the opposite seat.

No indications of life had come back, and the momentary flashes of the lamp as they came in through the glass door showed him to be to all appearances a corpse almost bolt upright.

Before the journey ended Monte bent across the space between the two seats and felt Captain Pygmy's pulse.

"How is he, doctor?" grinned Cinnabar.

"As dead as ever!" was the answer.

"What do you prescribe?"

"For a corpse?—nothing."

"Wait till we get to the end of the trip. If there isn't a resurrection then, there won't be one till Gabriel sounds his trumpet."

On, on went the cab, cutting the night over street after street.

At last it pulled up in front of a rather stately house of three stories. One end of it abutted on an alley, and when the horses stopped, Captain Cinnabar said to the driver.

"The first door down the alley to the left."

The cab moved on again, but only to turn and then to stop once more.

Captain Cinnabar lifted the form of the dwarf from the back while Monte opened a door with a key which had been handed to him in the alley for that purpose.

"Pay the cabby," whispered Cinnabar, bearing Captain Pygmy into the house.

All this was done in a few seconds.

Monte shut and locked the door when he had followed his master into the house, and found that Captain Pygmy was already sitting in a chair, but still in the same condition which had characterized him during the ride.

After looking at his captive for a little while Cinnabar took a small box from a shelf near at hand. Dipping his finger into the contents of the box, he applied it to the dwarf's upper lip.

For a second there was no result, then Captain Pygmy's head suddenly fell back, and in a flash the body bounded from the chair as if driven upward by a torpedo.

Captain Cinnabar burst into a loud laugh while Monte looked on astonished.

"Ha! ha! it takes a genuine corpse to resist that restorative!" cried the big man with his eyes fastened on Captain Pygmy, who from the middle of the room was taking in the situation as best his bewildered mind could. "Sit down, captain, and don't try to play dead any more. You're not on your way to the morgue now, and this is no patrol wagon."

Captain Pygmy repaid these insinuations with a look of bitter hatred, seeing which Cinnabar's smile only broadened, and he stepped toward the prisoner when that worthy retreated to a chair.

"If you want to remove the taste of the snuff which I presume has got down into your mouth, you will find the proper stuff on the table," continued Cinnabar.

The dwarf looked at the bottle and glasses there, but the presence of his enemies seemed enough for him and he did not accept the invitation.

"Who was the young miss you saw in the Park?" asked Cinnabar.

"I saw no one," was the unblushing answer.

"You see, Monte, our old friend the captain has the same high regard for the truth he used to have," laughed the big man with a glance at his companion.

"You insinuate!" snapped Captain Pygmy.

"Pardon me. I will make it plainer. When you say you saw nobody in Union Square Park to-night you simply lie. Is that bare enough for you?"

The dwarf in the chair kept his place with an effort.

"Now, who was the girl?" resumed Captain Cinnabar.

"That is my business."

The terseness of the reply did not appear to ruffle Cinnabar's temper.

He even looked toward Monte and dropped one of his upper eyelids good naturedly.

"If you're touchy on that point, I'll proceed to another," he said coming back to Captain Pygmy. "How are you and Juliette getting along?"

This time the dwarf started.

"Does she tolerate you after the past which she certainly remembers?"

"That is for you to find out."

"Come! no badinage!" exclaimed Cinnabar, and, crossing the floor, he halted before the dwarf. "Let us understand one another," he went on.

"I'm willing," said the little man as he rested his long arms on the sides of the chair as if to have them ready to protect his throat should it need protection.

"You've got another web on hand. Spider that you are, and as you have always been, you are spinning your threads to enmesh somebody. Your web has fallen across my path, and the infernal thrall of your manufacture interferes with my business, and that's why you are here! Now, Captain Pygmy, I want to tell you that, since the spinning has come to an end, with the web yet incomplete, let me ask you to tell the truth. The girl you saw in the Park belongs to the game you play."

"She does!"

There was a snap of fierce defiance mingled with a certain triumph in Pygmy's eyes. He seemed to know just how far he could go with himself in the clutches of the man of the iron grip.

"She belongs to my game," he went on as if the statement pleased him.

"Wasn't she Juliette's maid?"

"Yes."

"What is the child's name, Monte?" asked Cinnabar, turning to his companion.

"It is Lucy," responded Monte, and the reply found confirmation in Captain Pygmy's eyes.

"Do you want to get back into the house through the girl?" suddenly asked Cinnabar.

"Do you think I have been there?"

"You have. You played your dead trump there and deceived Juliette. What does she think of Ruff Raymont's death?"

"I never asked her."

"Do you mean that you have not seen her since?"

"I do."

"What do you think of it?"

"I agree with the doctors."

"Suffocation, eh?"

"Yes."

"By what?"

Captain Pygmy left his chair and stood erect on his short limbs.

"I halt here," said he. "I am willing to let the sharp detective who is now on the trail unravel the skein if he can."

"But you have an opinion."

"So I have, and I'll keep it, too!"

CHAPTER X.

LINKS.

It must have occurred with thrilling force to Captain Pygmy when he found himself in a room from which exit was one of the impossibilities, that he was a fly in the web, and no longer a spider and the maker of subtle thralls.

He walked the floor with the burning rage of a tiger, swinging his long arms, and calling down anathemas of the most horrible description upon the head of Cinnabar.

The room was cramped and his turns were many and sudden.

He did not stop to consider whether there were ears at the door, but continued his ravings regardless of everything till he desisted from sheer exhaustion and fell back into a chair to cool off.

"If curses could kill, captain, we'd be dead men now," laughed the man, who left the door on the outside of the room and joined Captain Cinnabar in another apartment of the same house.

"Didn't he let off something valuable, Monte?" was the query.

"Not a word in the whole tirade."

"Nothing about what he expects to do—when he gets out?"

"Nothing."

"I know the spider we hold in the web. If he can be will break through the meshes and play havoc with our plans; but I guess the thrall is strong enough to hold the blood-sucker. You know I have but to do this, Monte," and ending with a significant glance, Captain Cinnabar put up his hand along the wall and rested one of his fingers lightly on a dark button imbedded in the plastering.

"Why not do it now?" queried Monte.

"Would you?"

"Yes."

"Ah! you don't want any damaging possibilities in the way."

"That is it, exactly," responded Monte promptly. "A pressure of the little button, captain, and a limp spider will lie in a death-web. There will be no more shamming death, and we won't have to keep our eyes open for the deadly feelers of the crippled monster."

But Cinnabar, with a smile, took his hand from the button and smiled at Monte, who did not return it, but kept his face clothed in seriousness, if not in fear.

One hour later, the well-known figure of Cinnabar crossed the steps of a house some distance from the spider's prison, and was soon joined in a small room by a man who was older than he, and whose face with its close beard of dark brown, with here and there a gray hair, looked like a mask put on for a determined purpose.

The captain ordered a bottle of claret and glasses, which were brought in by a hump-backed boy, who eyed the pay very suspiciously before he put it away, and when the waiter had disappeared, Cinnabar bent forward and caught his companion's wrist.

"What have you found out, Xerxes?" he asked eagerly.

"I've picked up a link or two."

"About the Raymont mystery?"

"Yes."

"Tell me without further ceremony."

The man Xerxes first broke the neck of the bottle across the edge of the table and helped himself, then he wiped his beard with a hand which had a missing finger, and continued:

"A woman did it, captain. Ruff Raymont had a female visitor a short time before he was found dead in the library. She came to the house heavily-veiled, and for a purpose. Mariette, the maid, made several discoveries of which I have taken some advantage. In the first place, the strange woman wore a very singular-looking ring—a gold one with a serpent's

head with diamond eyes. The girl saw it on her hand when she admitted her."

"Good eyes has Mariette," complimented Captain Cinnabar.

"Yes; and they're pretty eyes, too," continued Xerxes.

"You don't want to let them catch you."

Xerxes grinned and shook his head.

"Well," he went on, "Nora bent on vengeance was after a detective before the general was cold. She went straight to the office of a man who is said to never fail on a trail that interests him. I speak now of Jack Javert, the Independent Sleuth. She secured his services, and Javert is now working the case for all there is in it."

Again a smile played with Captain Cinnabar's mouth as he thought where he had left the Gotham shadow.

"But what have you discovered about the veiled woman?" he said, with a move of the hand as he turned to Xerxes again. "You were instructed to take up her trail, not the detective's."

"So I was, and on it I picked up my first link" was the reply.

"Good. Now we shall have something tangible, Xerxes."

"I think I have tracked Raymont's visitor down."

Captain Cinnabar's eyes got a gleam they had not had before.

His brown silken hands closed with glee, and he watched Xerxes with a delight which he could not suppress.

"Here! look at this!" exclaimed Xerxes, drawing from an inner pocket a small card, which he threw on the table, and saw it snatched up the moment it touched the board.

Cinnabar looked at the prize thus secured, and then at his detective companion. He had read:

"ZUBIANO!

QUEEN OF SORCERY.

Daughter of the Stars.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, holding the card between finger and thumb.

"I found it in a cab."

"Ho! Was it left by accident or design, Xerxes?"

"Not design, I think, but one cannot tell. I discovered that at an early hour in the morning a woman left a cab, at a corner near Raymont's house. The driver is one of the best-known cabmen in New York, from what they tell me. I found him, and in order to get into his favor, I had him drive me around the Park. All this before I asked a word about the woman. In the Park I mounted to the box with him, and it wasn't long before I had his tongue on the jump. He didn't know much, but he remembered the passenger whom he had taken to near Raymont's house. As he had heard nothing of the general's death, I did not enlighten him. I made him believe that I was an ex-cabby who, having made a raise, had retired from the profession, and the way I talked about the business must have opened his eyes."

"Xerxes, you're a trump!" ejaculated Captain Cinnabar, which compliment the spy received with a nod.

"The cabman made a discovery when he brushed out the cab, shortly after the woman's ride," resumed Xerxes. "He found that card on the seat."

"And gave it to you?"

"No; at an opportune moment I took it from his pocket."

"But whither did he drive his passenger?"

"He let her out on middle Broadway."

Cinnabar's countenance was seen to drop.

"So the person who visited Raymont is playing sorceress somewhere, is she?" he mused, holding the card above the table and studying it. "Xerxes, does your chain end here? Didn't you attempt to follow up the clew?"

"Of course I did, captain. When a fellow knows a little, he is certain to want to know more. I've taken a turn among the sorceresses since."

"From witch to witch, eh, Xerxes?"

"Just so—from fraud to fraud—in other words."

"Well?"

"While I did not find Zubiano, I am by no means satisfied that she is not in Gotham. She does not advertise her calling like the rest of the humbugs. She may be without rooms just now."

"But what did the cabman say about her face?" queried Cinnabar.

"He did not see it."

"Nor the ring on her hand which you say Mariette, the maid, saw?"

"Nor the ring, captain."

Xerxes leaned over the table and looked at his brown-faced master.

"What do you think of my link, captain?" he asked.

"It will take more than the one to complete the chain."

"Yes; but isn't it a start?" persisted Xerxes.

"A start that calls a halt," was the response.

"We must find the whereabouts of this Zubiano.

We must lift the veil and look at her face. You know the verdict of the doctors, Xerxes?"

"Suffocation by a compound of which they know nothing," cried Xerxes. "You see the learned doctors of New York are baffled at the outset. There was a strange odor in the room when Nora entered and found her father dead on the floor. That was the drug which did the business."

"Undoubtedly," assented Captain Cinnabar.

"I wonder what Nora's detective has discovered, if anything," remarked Xerxes. "He had no card to start with, and I am sure he found no clew at the house where he heard Nora and Mariette's narratives. I think I can keep up with this sleuth if he gives me half a chance. I used to be of some account among the mountains."

"So you did, Xerxes. You followed a trail for General Raymont once."

"Ah!" cried Xerxes, his eyes brightening with remembrance. "It was a long trail, too. And, by Jove! it was a witch's trail like the one I'm on now."

Captain Cinnabar met his detective's laugh with a smile.

"As you caught your witch then you ought to catch her now," said he.

"So I should, but the ground is not the same. Then it was over mountain and desert, from Camp Satan to Paradise Ranch, and through cactus and sage-brush. Now it is from street to street, through city gloom and alley shadows. No, captain, the ground is not the same, but give me time."

For a moment Cinnabar made a silent study of the face before him.

"Xerxes," said he, suddenly, "you never told me what your witch said when you left her for the last time."

"That is because you never asked me, captain," smiled Cinnabar's companion. "I delivered the full report to the general. She leaned toward me from the saddle of her dead horse and said in a whisper I shall never forget: 'Tell him and his that though a thousand years intervene, I will pay them back!' A thousand years have not elapsed—nothing like it, Captain Cinnabar—and we're all alive yet. Only the general has crossed the river, and by a witch's hand."

"By bers, Xerxes?"

"Thunders! no," was the answer. "I'd like to know how she could come back from the country whose whereabouts I have never divulged. No, she is there now. The general picked up a later enemy somewhere. He has been living East for fifteen years—plenty of time for him to raise a crop of hatreds. Now, shall I go back to the trail?"

"We must find Zubiano, the Daughter of the Stars."

"It shall be done despite the keen scent of Nora's sleuth."

"Ah, Javert will discover nothing," answered Cinnabar. "The shrewdness of her shadow shall be valueless to all. The general's gold now lies at Nora's feet, and Juliette has set her snare—for you know what, Xerxes."

"I know Juliette!" exclaimed the spy. "I know her only too well, and I want her there!"

He threw forward both hands and shut them madly like a pair of vise.

"Don't let your head rush you into danger," admonished Captain Cinnabar.

"Trust me, captain," laughed Xerxes and a moment later he was gone.

Out on the street he glided away like a shadow, and the night and the city swallowed the Californian's spy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEB IN DANGER.

CAPTAIN CINNABAR, thus left alone, did not remain long in the house. The footsteps of his spy soon died away.

"If this woman whose hand is playing so subtilely in this game has become a sorceress in Gotham she must be found," murmured he. "Xerxes was extremely lucky to find the card, but when he went down among the black art frauds his luck vanished. Give my old ferret time and he will unearth Zubiano; but I am anxious to know something about her right away. With me always it is: 'The sooner the better.' I could have explained how I came to know that Javert the sleuth will never find the trail for his mistress but I would have gained nothing by doing so. Javert did not have to be thus supplied. I will keep my secret about the detective awhile longer for I consider the same as my own when I am sharing it with Monte who never betrays."

Cinnabar looked at his watch as he went out upon the street and noted that the hour was not very late.

He went almost direct to Ruff Raymont's late abode and rung.

Mariette's eyes filled with surprise when she saw the large man on the steps, but instead of refusing him admittance she waited for him to announce his business.

"Could I see Miss Nora?" asked the Californian.

The girl retired, but soon came back.

In another moment Cinnabar was in the dead

millionaire's parlor waiting for the step and voice of Nora the heiress.

It was not long before he found the young girl standing before him.

"You know what has happened," said he, fixing her eyes on Captain Cinnabar as she came forward. "I have been wondering ever since why you did not come."

"I have not been in the city," answered the man with unblushing coolness. "It was about the first news that met me on my return and here I am."

She had taken a chair almost in front of him, and was looking at him while he spoke.

"If I can help you, speak, Nora," he went on. "This is a case for the shrewd hunter if I have not been misinformed."

"One is on the track now."

"A detective?"

"One of the best," said the girl with confidence.

"I am glad of that. You did well not to waste time. What does your sleuth-hound say?"

Nora hesitated and lost color as she avoided Captain Cinnabar's look.

"I must confess that thus far he has left me in the dark," she replied at length and in tones of considerable disappointment.

"What! has he made no report of progress?" cried the captain assuming a look of surprise.

"I have not seen him since he left the house to take the trail."

"I don't understand such work."

"Nor I, but then I do not know much about the ways of those men who follow crime to its lair. He did not say when he would come, but if he has made any important discoveries, I would like to be informed. But never mind. I shall let nothing daunt me. If one sleuth fails another takes his place. The blood of my father calls for vengeance and woman though I am nothing shall stay my hand. I may have to take the trail myself—women have been driven to stranger tasks than this, Captain Cinnabar—but the guilty shall have no rest. You knew my father long before he came to New York?"

"I have known him for many years."

"I thought so."

Nora crossed the room followed by Cinnabar's eyes, and opened a small upright desk in one corner.

When she came back she held in her hand a rough daguerreotype which she thrust without ceremony into the Californian's hands.

"Is that my father?" she asked,

Captain Cinnabar looked at the picture which was that of a handsome man in full beard, wide sombrero-like hat, sash, tight pantaloons and high embroidered boots.

The likeness bore no resemblance to General Raymont at the time of his death: it resembled the portrait of some cowboy king or prince of the Wild West.

Holding the tintype in his hand the Californian looked up at Nora as if he doubted the earnestness of her question; but one glance dispelled all doubts.

"You knew my father, General Raymont, years ago," continued the girl. "Did he ever look like that?"

"Do you think he did, Nora?"

"Yes," came the prompt and emphatic response. "I know more about him than I did a week ago. I know that there was once a Camp Satan and a Paradise Ranch. I know that one Colonel Nero ruled the first named place and its adjacent territory with all the authority of a Russian czar, that he was at the head of a league of men who struck whenever he said 'strike!' and who levied tribute on people of all conditions. Isn't this true?"

"Your story sounds like romance," said Captain Cinnabar.

"Ha! you do not meet me fairly," cried Nora. "You are holding in your hands at this moment the portrait of Colonel Nero, the crowned brigand of Southern California. Do you intend to deny it, captain? In the little room directly overhead is a desk into which I never looked till last night. I do not know what was destroyed before the woman with the serpent-beaded ring did her mysterious work. I only know what the desk yielded me. In the first place, it gave up that portrait. Secondly, it surrendered a lot of papers which leave no doubt that when you first knew General Raymont he was a man with a double name. He was Colonel Nero, and Captain Cinnabar was his chief lieutenant!"

Most men would have started with a protest against this cool charge, spoken in language which could not be misconstrued, but the Californian did not betray the least remonstrance. On the contrary, he met it with a subtle smile, which wreathed his lips in a halo of wickedness, that matched the gleam in the depths of his eyes.

"Well, what does this discovery amount to?" he asked. "Are you going to give it to the world, and let all New York form a different and not very complimentary opinion of General Raymont?"

The girl bent forward, and studied his face for a moment.

"Ought I to keep silent?" cried she. "With

what I know now can I rightfully claim the wealth which has fallen into my hands? It may be plunder. You ought to know, Captain Cinnabar, if the papers up-stairs, which bear your name in several places, tell me half the truth. But why haven't you answered squarely? Do you disown your master, now that he is dead?"

The cunning smile vanished, and the dark, brown face grew darker and more serious than ever.

"I disown no one! I deny nothing!" he suddenly exclaimed, to see Nora start back at sound of his voice.

"You see before you the captain of the Spider League of California. I served the man who went to his grave as General Raymont, when, in fact, he was Colonel Nero, the prince of Camp Satan, and a man of many crimes. I don't see why you should be seized with a spasm of contrition because of your discovery of the true facts of your ancestry. There are thousands in Gotham who would give their very souls to stand where you stand to-night. Ruff Raymont's name and money would be good enough for them. Why, you seemed to love the man!"

"I did, but because I read the startling papers in his desk, I am not going to recall the sleuth I have set upon the trail."

"Neither would I."

"I know that there were in those days trails for gain whose secrets have never been fully disclosed," Nora went on. "I ask you about none of them, Captain Cinnabar. I shall not seek to know whom 'Pantherina' was, nor who was followed by a devil incarnate called Xerxes. Some of my father's papers I threw aside with but a glance at their contents. I saw enough, however. I want the end of the mystery which confronts me now. The woman who kills with a drug of some kind is the object before me. My detective is on the trail, or at least I have done all in my power to put him there. If I had found the documents sooner I might have sent him away more fully armed."

"Why not call him back and give him all the secrets you have unearthed?"

"No, not now. Let him hunt with what he has," answered Nora.

"He may find nothing."

"Then for a better sleuth!"

"Nora, you are bound to uncover the past in a life that made you happy."

"I shall not stop!" cried the girl. "Somebody has suffered at the hands of Colonel Nero and the Spider League; some may be suffering yet. Those papers tell me that there has been a general eluding of the nooses of justice."

Captain Cinnabar left his chair, and his fine form straightened before Nora while he looked her squarely in the eye.

"Was that a threat?" he said, speaking through teeth well clinched. "You have not forgotten that I belonged to the Spider League."

"I forget nothing, Captain Cinnabar. I saw more names than yours and his on the documents. God knows what whispering fate prevailed on him to keep those papers till the day of his death. I intend to hold back my hand for nothing. It may be too late to right all the wrongs done under the banner of California's bandit king, but while I follow the mystery of his death, I shall also endeavor to give to the wronged their rights, and to Justice and Vengeance all their own!"

Nora's voice died away in a silence that had no echo.

Captain Cinnabar lifted his hand which was clinched.

A flash was leaping into being under his heavy black lashes, and a curse struggled toward his lips, but he suppressed both.

"You'll have your hands full—let me tell you!" he merely said. "You and your detective, whoever he is, will find a tangled skein on a mountain of Mahomet in your way. I'm sorry you don't value the name the dead gave you."

"How do I know I am entitled even to that?" exclaimed Nora.

There was no direct reply to this, and three minutes afterward, when Captain Cinnabar found himself on the pavement with the wind from the bay blowing across his face, he hissed:

"Now, crush the flies in the web, or the mad heiress of Colonel Nero will cut the web itself to pieces!"

CHAPTER XII.

CONVINCING MAGIC.

ABOUT the time of these occurrences a handsome woman with a stately presence arrived at the closed door of Detective Javert's office.

It was Juliette.

The woman who had been robbed could stand the suspense no longer, and she had come to see why the sleuth whom she had sworn into her service had delivered no report.

Juliette found no one in the office, and when she had exhausted her patience in waiting she turned away with bitter disappointment written on her face.

"Does the trail keep him from me, or has he already played me false?" she asked herself. "If the latter be the case, Captain Javert may learn that I do not allow myself to be hoodwinked with impunity. I expected a report of progress,"

before this, and here I have received nothing of the kind!"

Juliette went down to the busy street and was soon lost in the sea of humanity that ebbed and flowed under the lamps.

Her thoughts were still on Javert and they were not pleasant ones.

A cab took her home, and once in her parlor she rang for Lucy who soon made her appearance.

The little girl saw the cast of Juliette's countenance, and from the moment of her entrance the sloe-black eyes of the woman were fixed upon her.

"Girl, do you ever consult the sorceress?" asked Juliette.

Lucy shook her head.

"Do you believe in such people?"

"I do not know," answered the girl. "Perhaps it is because I don't know much about them."

"That is true; you are very young. Well, I have lost the man I put on the trail of my valuables. Javert the sleuth has played false to me. I might have known that he was like others of his class who cannot be trusted."

"Did you see him?"

"No. I found his office shut up—locked," was the reply. "I have known some of the black art people to do wonderful things in magic and second sight. I am going to consult some of them. Bring me the paper."

The girl vanished but soon reappeared with an evening paper which Juliette opened with eager fingers.

"Here they are!" she exclaimed, her eye resting at the top of a certain column. "What bombastic names some of these people have."

"I have never looked," said Lucy.

"You? no, of course not," smiled Juliette. "Let me see. Here is a name I have never noticed before. Is this another new star in witchcraft. 'Zubiano, Queen of Sorcery and Daughter of the Stars!'" How does that sound, girl?"

"There is much in the title whether there be anything in the weaver's professions or not."

"I am going to try Zubiano," concluded Juliette. "I've had something to do with the others."

She looked at the announcement again as if to fix the address in her mind and then went upstairs.

Twenty minutes later she left the house and was soon being whirled away in a closed cab.

Juliette knew that the most of the so-called sorceresses are accessible at any time, and she was not afraid of not getting a hearing despite the time.

If she could play lamb and tiger both as one of our characters has already said, she was evidently making up for the latter role for there was fire in her eyes while she occupied a seat in the cab.

After many turnings the horses came to a halt at last, and Juliette pressed her face against the glass door, and looked out.

The nearest lamp showed her a plain old-fashioned brick house with heavy shutters and wide steps.

There was nothing on the outside to show that it was the abode of a woman who boasted of being a daughter of the stars, and if Juliette had not seen the number over the door she might have thought she had been driven to the wrong house.

Juliette mounted the steps after dismissing the cab with instructions and rung the bell.

A minute elapsed, then the door was opened and Juliette saw a face which seemed to float in the air for she could not see the semblance of a body.

She walked in, perhaps because the door was held open to her, and when it shut she found herself in a hall midway in which the word "Zubiano" appeared to float in the air.

"Do you wish to consult the Fates?" asked a voice at Juliette's side and she noticed a girl so small that she appeared as a little child with an old face on her shoulders.

"I want to see Zubiano," replied Juliette, and she then felt several long fingers touch her hand, and she was led down the hall and under the floating name to a door beyond.

This door opened magically and at the same time the fingers and their owner vanished, and Juliette Jansen discovered that she had entered an apartment fitted up for the abode of sorcery of some kind.

The ceiling was painted in exact representation of the heavens. A crimson curtain worked with zodiacal signs was stretched across the room in the middle and the furniture odd and somber suggested the black arts to a mind on a strain as Juliette's was.

She stood in contemplation of her surroundings till she became conscious of the nearness of a presence of some kind.

There came a soft footfall on the carpet, the lights in the room flared up, and as Juliette turned she saw that she was no longer alone.

Before her stood a magnificent figure, richly clad in long robes. It was as tall as her own. The face was covered by a black mask of close-fitting silk. The arms were bared to the

shoulders and devoid of all ornaments save a pair of gold wristlets from which hung little chains with polished links.

Juliette at first let a sneer wreath her lips for this make-up, but the eyes that looked over the top of the mask drove it away, and a singular feeling took possession of her mind.

"Don't stand speechless before Zubiano," came from beneath the mask. "You have come to hear what she can reveal. She can find the trail of your ferret, or point out the missing path of love."

Juliette seemed to fall back at the allusion to the very errand which had in part brought her to the abode of sorcery.

Zubiano came forward till the tips of the outstretched fingers almost touched her visitor's lips.

"Has my lady Juliette a tongue to-night?" she asked.

Lucy's mistress uttered a cry.

"Yes, my tongue is here!" she exclaimed. "I own that you have touched it with the wand of magic, but I will loosen it for you. I am here to try your skill, Zubiano. You have called my name. I am Mrs. Jansen when I am not merely 'Juliette.' Do you pretend to find the lost?"

"I pretend to have full control of the art I practice," was the reply.

"You find lost property and uncover mysteries?"

"I follow the revealments of the stars."

Juliette looked once more at the glowing eyes before her and continued:

"If you do this, tell me something of my past."

"You know that already."

"True, but I would know what your gifts are."

"Ho! you come to consult me with doubts of my power!" cried the sorceress, with a light laugh ending the sentence. "Is that it, woman? The past, eh? You want to know what Zubiano can do. If she can uncover the past she may know the future. You are not the first person who has sought this test. Wait."

The strange woman disappeared beyond the red curtain and Juliette was again alone.

"I've found one of the queens of magic!" she thought. "If she can put me on the trail I will let Javert the sleuth slip out of my employ for I am equal to whoever has robbed me if I once know where to find the guilty."

At this moment the curtain swept across the apartment, leaving the space which it had hidden entirely open.

The lights, though burning brightly over Juliette's head did not seem to penetrate the part uncovered and the woman in her eagerness to see, leaned forward with bated breath.

"Stand back, daughter of fate, and look at the mysterious."

Juliette recoiled at sound of the strange voice, and saw that a thin vapor was rising from a caldron on a brasier of living coals.

This lasted for a second, when the vapor lifted and a red spot perfectly round and as large as a shield appeared on the wall before her.

"Look at the crimson shield!" said the same voice.

In another minute the color of the shield had changed to a brilliant yellow while it increased in size but still retained its rotundity.

Presently it covered the whole wall in front of Juliette, and then a rough mountain landscape appeared on its surface.

Juliette saw the towering peaks and pines, and there grew before her a canyon with a road winding between the precipitous walls. It looked like nature itself.

"Does the child of fate see?" asked the voice.

"I see," answered Juliette.

Then there came into view down the canyon bed a figure on horseback. It increased in size as it drew nearer till Juliette saw that it was a woman in the saddle.

"That is enough!" she cried. "I am convinced that you can open the closed portals of the past."

"Not yet," was the response. "Watch the woman in the canyon."

"No!" responded Juliette putting up her hands. "I have seen enough, I tell you."

"Look once more."

Instinctively Lucy Lemon's mistress turned her eyes to the yellow disk again when lo! the horse vanished, and the canyon became filled with great birds with large black wings!

The spectator went back with a cry which she could not suppress.

"It is enough! enough!" she exclaimed and the birds and the yellow circle vanished.

"You know what I can do," said a voice at her side and Juliette felt a hand at her wrist. "With the past unlocked do you want the future opened, woman? I would not if I were you. I am Zubiano, the Daughter of the Stars. If you want to see into the coming days—if you insist on knowing in what manner the skeleton hand of the canyon's victim will clutch the guilty—I will reveal it all. Do you command? Is your silence proof of your overweening curiosity? Come! let me lead you to the altar of fate—to the shrine of the mysterious. You are Juliette, but you have been more. I will show

you the trail of your human ferret. I will slip back upon your finger the serpent-headed ring which he is to find for you, and I will take you down the highway of fate to the end which none of us can escape."

The eyes of Zubiano seemed to burn on Juliette's cheeks, and the grip on her wrist was as red-hot iron.

"No! no! not now!" shrieked Juliette, breaking away. "I know you can do it all. I am suffocating! I am dying! Air! air!" and she threw up her hands only to hear a wild laugh in the room, and to sink back into utter darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DWARF'S FIND.

"It seems to me that a fellow ought to get out o' here. Captain Cinnabar spins his webs to suit himself, and this one appears to his liking. I was caught on the street an' fetched here in a cab, driven by a man I did not get to see, because I was blindfolded. My 'dead game' did not work with the captain and Monte. He reminded me that I was not trying to beat the police, an' that I was somewhere else than riding in a patrol wagon. He's a shrewd scamp, is Captain Cinnabar, an' he's added to the tricks be used to play when he was Colonel Nero's lieutenant in the Spider League country."

Captain Pygmy, whom we left in a web of Cinnabar's spinning, leaned against the wall of a little room barely eight by ten, and gave utterance to words like the foregoing.

He was decidedly out of humor, and escape was uppermost in his mind.

As he had observed by a close inspection of his surroundings, there seemed no loophole to liberty, and by the time he got through with his expressed ideas, he was almost ready to despair.

The one door of the cage was locked, and its two windows were heavily battened.

Captain Pygmy was surprised that Cinnabar had left him with any breath in his body, but the strength of the web compensated him for this.

More than once he had made the circuit of the little room.

Thoughts of Lucy finding out some news, and of Captain Cinnabar winning his game, exasperated the dwarfed Hercules of Gotham to a degree indescribable.

With an oath he sprung from the wall and made for the door again.

Failing there, as he had failed before, he returned to a certain place which had before attracted him.

This was a hole which the rats of New York had at some time gnawed through the floor from beneath the house.

Frequent incursions of rodents had made a hole large enough for him to insert the tips of his fingers. Already he had taken several strong pulls at the board in hopes of raising it, but, as yet, the nails had caused it to resist all efforts.

"Once more," said Captain Pygmy through his teeth. "I've got more strength than they give me credit for, and now I shall put every bit of it to the test."

In another moment he was pulling upward, with his muscles standing out like whipcords, and his face almost black.

Suddenly there sounded the yielding of a plank, and before Captain Pygmy could check his power the board broke at his feet, and he fell backward almost against the furthest wall.

"Victory!" he exclaimed. "So this is the web that was to hold the fly, eh, Captain Cinnabar? Now, by the nine gods! let me follow up this success."

The Californian's prisoner went back to the opening. It was not large enough to admit his body, but he soon wrenched loose another board and then feasted his eyes on the cavernous opening beneath.

It was not difficult for him to reach ground under the floor.

He did not know whither a tunnel would lead him, but he did not stop to think.

Captain Pygmy was soon enacting the role of gopher under the floor.

His hands were as good as the claws of the ground-hog, and he used them to advantage in the loose dirt beneath the house.

At the end of two hours he stopped in his labors. He had passed the foundations of Captain Cinnabar's web.

"Let it be up now," he said to himself, and forthwith he broke the earth of the roof of his tunnel.

All at once a quantity of dirt fell in upon him, and at the same time he heard the rumble of wagons and the voices of people.

"Not so bad after all!" he laughed, drawing himself out of the hole which the caving in of the earth had made. "Where is that death-clutch of yours, Captain Cinnabar? If it can't hold any better than it has held me, it is a grasp of straw."

Once out of the hole he did not tarry long in the alley where he was.

A few leaps carried him to the street where he took as good a survey of his late prison as the light would permit.

"A broken web an' a lively spider!" chuckled the dwarf, drawing back. "It seems to me

that I have been an age in that house, but I have not been there many hours. Now I'd like to know whether Lucy has made any new discoveries. Has Jack Javert reported yet to Juliette, and if so does he know who killed General Raymond and for what?"

Captain Pygmy was not the person to let grass grow under his feet when he had anything important on hand.

He went to the Park in faint hopes of finding Lucy there, but as he was not successful he turned his steps toward Juliette's house. There for two hours he watched like a spy with his body deftly concealed by the shadows that lurked around.

He lost sight of nobody who approached the premises. He saw all pedestrians who passed the steps, and every one was watched till he was no longer visible.

Captain Pygmy had the faculty of patience well developed, but his vigils at length tired him out.

He turned to go with a last lingering look at the house when a cab approached the curb and then halted in the gutter.

"Hello! Juliette coming home!" ejaculated the dwarf. "This is the reward of patience, an' I've won it fairly."

He saw the cab-door open and the figure of a woman step out.

This opened the captain's eyes more than ever.

The next instant the woman hopped out another member of her own sex, and assisted her up the steps.

"Remember! Silent tongue and victory!" Captain Pygmy heard. "A noise—or an attempt to set a single ferret after me—and over you go to the police!"

The person who seemed to speak these words jerked the knocker and supported her companion till the door was opened.

"Good-night," she said in audible tones as she pushed Juliette into the hall and almost before the door had closed she was going back to the cab.

"I'll let Juliette go an' look after the other one," exclaimed Captain Pygmy. "There has been some dark work here. It is midnight an' Juliette comes home in the grip—yes, that is the word—of an unknown woman. I can afford to keep track of the stranger."

By this time the vehicle was getting out of the gutter, and it was no trick at all for the dwarf to spring forward and swing his body into a nice position between the hind wheels.

Away went the horses with the twisted body of the midnight spy clinging to the place he had assumed.

It was a jolting ride over almost deserted streets, but the captain was not the man to give up the chase with anything left undiscovered.

He was rewarded at last for the cab stopped at last a long distance from Juliette's house, and in a quarter of the city entirely strange to him.

Still keeping his position, he saw the occupant of the cab alight and enter a house with a night key. At the next corner he left his uncomfortable perch and ran back.

"Ho! I see the number now," he cried, drawing close to the building. "Ah! I saw it in the paper I looked over in the lunch-room where I stopped to satisfy my hunger after getting out o' Captain Cinnabar's web. I connect a name with the figures. It is Zubiano's house I have found, and Zubiano is a sorceress."

He seemed to step back for the sole purpose of collecting his thoughts.

"It was Zubiano who brought Juliette home," he went on. "Now, why did she do this? Is Juliette playing sleuth herself after her serpent-headed ring and her other valuables? She has grown tired of her detective's failure to report. She is going to trust Javert no longer, so she goes to Zubiano the Sorceress, mebbe to see if the queen of humbugs cannot put her on the trail. Pish! the female fraud can do nothing but bleed Juliette. I will do more than that myself. Come, Captain Pygmy, you must go back."

Away went the nimble-footed dwarf, with a final glance at the home of the sorceress.

He seemed to have but one destination now—Juliette's abode, for half an hour after taking the back track he reached the place.

Captain Pygmy was possessed with a fierce desire to know what was going on in the house.

He wondered if Lucy was there, and whether she had discovered Juliette's connection with the sorceress. Neither did he forget his last visit to the house, nor how, in one of his tricks which admirably counterfeited death, he had been bundled into the patrol wagon and taken to the morgue.

He was playing for a fortune, which he said belonged to Lucy Lemon, with whose identity he professed to be familiar.

Strange man that he was—hated by Captain Cinnabar, and wanted by more hands than the Californian's—he wanted to see what had become of Juliette since coming home.

He watched the house as he had done before, hoping that the girl Lucy would come out, but the fates were against him.

"I must know. I will know!" he cried at

length. " Didn't I get in the other time by strategy, though a little too late to witness the robbery? Now, let me see what I can do again."

Captain Pygmy soon reappeared at the rear of Juliette's house.

Compressing his body into what appeared to be a cellar-window, he took out an iron grating, and squeezed his supple body into a dark place below.

" Going in by the old way!" he laughed to himself. " By the nine gods! I'm in luck."

It did not take the dwarf long to get from the basement into the house above.

He crept down the hall, and opened a door which once before had yielded to his hands.

There Captain Pygmy halted, with the latch still in his clutch. Something indefinable seemed to hold him back.

What if Juliette, playing tigress, was standing beyond the door, ready to press a revolver against his head?

" Haven't I the quickness of a cat and the strength of Hercules?" was the question with which he met this thought. " This is Juliette's room I am going into. I will be on the alert."

He took another step forward, and opened the door still more.

Suddenly a step fell upon his eager ears, and then a light was uncovered.

" Lucy!" cried Captain Pygmy, springing forward, and clutching the wrist of the young girl, rendered spellbound by his apish presence in the room.

" Don't! don't!" whispered Lucy, and then she pointed across the room. " Juliette is yonder. I dragged her to the couch myself. She came home with some one, but fell in the hall with a terrible cry."

Captain Pygmy snatched up a light and sprung forward.

" My God, child!" he shrieked. " Juliette is dead!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FEATHERING A NEST.

THE girl, Lucy, clasped her hands beside the couch, and looked at the motionless figure with stareful eyes.

" Is she dead?" she asked. " She was breathing, I am sure of it, when I brought her in from the hall. No, she cannot have passed away so quickly!"

Captain Pygmy picked up one of the hands that lay carelessly beside Juliette's figure, and held it for a moment.

" I'm afraid it's all over," said he, looking up into the anxious face of the girl. " Did you hear Juliette come back?"

" I heard the carriage approach the sidewalk. I was wide awake. When the door opened I was at the top of the stairs trying to see who was with Juliette. I caught a glimpse of another woman, nothing more. Almost before the door was shut, Juliette threw her hands to her head, and uttering a cry which I shall never forget, sunk to the floor like one struck with death. I stood spell-bound where I was for I don't know how long. When I reached Juliette the carriage had been driven away. I was alone with my mistress, for I am now her only companion. She dismissed the maid yesterday. Well, I brought her into this room—I cannot tell you how. And now you say that Juliette is dead!"

" Not dead, but without hope," answered Captain Pygmy, looking again at Juliette.

" If a spark of life remains, let us try to kindle it into a flame."

" No!" grated the dwarf, touching the girl's arm, as she fell back. " Listen to me, child. This woman stood between us and the fortune—between you and the secret of your birth."

" Did she know it?"

" Yes."

" Then she must not die."

" Hold! she did not have a monopoly of the secret," continued Captain Pygmy with a smile. " Let her go. Her death will make things easier of solution, though I would not have had it thus. She used to be a weaver of webs, a maker of snares. Ha! I used to know her well. I've but lately got out of a web myself. Has her sleuth reported?"

" He never came back," replied Lucy.

" Therefore Juliette got no clew to her missing ring and other valuables?"

" None whatever."

Captain Pygmy went back to Mrs. Jansen, whose face had not changed.

" Does she live yet?" asked the girl.

" Life is still here."

" Then, for Heaven's sake, let us save her!"

" Save this woman?" came through the dwarf's teeth. " I'm going to stay here till she's dead!"

With a frightened look Lucy drew back and regarded the little Hercules with feelings of disgust. His eyes glittered like a serpent's, and he stood over Juliette as a tiger stands over the doe he has just destroyed.

" Merciful Father, have I linked myself to this monster?" mentally ejaculated the girl. " He seems more than half tiger. Does he really know anything about me, or is he playing

me in order to avenge himself against Juliette? Maybe he has thrown Captain Javert off the scent. He is capable of doing anything."

" If you don't want to stay here, go to your own room," suddenly said the dwarf turning upon the girl. " I am going to see this woman die, I told you."

Still watching him and trembling in his presence, Lucy drew back, and with a last look at the woman on the couch, she glided from the room, and left him alone with the inanimate form of Juliette.

For a moment Captain Pygmy did not stir, then he bounded to the door and listened.

Lucy's steps had died away and he heard nothing.

" Nothing better than this could have happened!" he exclaimed, coming back to the bed.

" When I was in this house before I did not get to play my favorite hand. I only got a chance to enact my dead role and get bundled off to the morgue for my trouble. The girl is thoroughly unnerved and frightened, and I have everything my own way. Juliette must have seen too much in Zubiano's temple of fate. At least she did not come home in good condition. It suits me to a T, as I've said before. Now I'll know something or nothing."

He parted the heavy curtains that hung between him and Juliette's private chamber into which Lucy had never passed. He crept across the threshold with noiseless motion, and set the little light he carried upon a heavily-carved desk which filled one corner.

Captain Pygmy had not come to the room unarmed, for when he opened one of his hands he displayed a bunch of keys which he had taken from the unconscious woman.

With these in his possession, it was not difficult for him to get into the desk.

" Here I am!" he cried, as the lid yielded. " Now I will know the fate of the woman hunted down by Colonel Nero and the Spider League thousands of miles from here."

The interior of the desk was divided into little compartments which contained many papers.

The dwarf went at them at once.

The tapestry having closed behind him, he could not be seen from the room where Juliette lay, and he kept his body between the door and the light.

Captain Pygmy's nimble fingers followed his quick and eager eyes.

He found one paper which, after a glance, he hid in his bosom, then another followed it.

" I've got enough," said he. " I think I will hold the secret Juliette has guarded so well. The hunted woman of the Sierras did not perish. Xerxes simply lied when he came back and told Colonel Nero, afterward General Raymont of Gotham, that he carried out his sealed instructions to the letter. Xerxes is here now, and on another trail, of course, for his old pard, Captain Cinnabar, directs him. And Monte is here, too. I have lately felt Monte's clutch, and the captain's, also, for that matter. Cinnabar wants Raymont's wealth, but at the same time he is playing for the heiress, too. Nobody is actually against them. Nobody? Yes, I am to the bitter end, and so is the woman who killed the general, whoever she is! Juliette employed a detective to find her snake headed ring, and Nora hired one to run down the general's slayer. And the strange thing about it all is that they should pick on the same sleuth—Javert of Broadway. But where is Javert? Ah, there's the puzzle!"

Captain Pygmy laughed mysteriously over the problem which had stopped him.

" Maybe Javert fell into one of Cinnabar's webs," he went on. " Or perhaps he got too hot on the trail of the general's slayer and met Colonel Nero's fate. I don't care so the sleuth keeps away from me. I don't want Javert on my trail till I have played my trumps and won. I intend to feather my nest with the money of the man who when he was the king spider of the merciless league in California, issued a two-worded command which nearly ended my career."

He shut the desk and took good care to lock it.

Then he searched the room a while longer, but found nothing to his liking, for his hands carried nothing away.

" I've got enough!" said he, with a grin. " I can go back and look at the dead, and then slip away without disturbing the girl."

Back he went to Juliette, lying where he had left her.

He did not hold the lamp close to her face this time and one look seemed enough.

A smile of satisfaction appeared at his mouth, a new glitter lit up the depths of his eyes, and stealing from the room he listened in the hall for a few moments, and let himself out of the house.

If he had gone up-stairs to the little room which Lucy occupied when she was under Juliette's roof, he would have been treated to a surprise.

The chamber was empty.

Lucy Lemon was on the street instead of hiding in the room with the shadow of Juliette's terrible stroke around her.

The girl had left the house by the rear exit,

and when Captain Pygmy was going through the desk she was squares away.

A strange desire appeared to give speed to Lucy's feet. She crossed the Park where she had several times encountered Captain Pygmy, nor did she stop till she ran up the steps leading to Javert's office.

" I am back here again," she exclaimed, finding herself at the door. " I know of no other man whom I need now. Where is the detective whose fame is so great, and why can't I find him? He never even reported to Juliette, and she needs him more than ever to-night. I need him, too!"

She tried the door, twisting the knob in every direction in her eagerness, and giving vent to her bitter disappointment in appropriate language.

" Gone! gone!" she cried. " I am helpless without Javert. He promised to help me in every way in his power and Heaven knows this is my time of need. I—"

Lucy heard some one coming up the stair, and breaking her sentence she drew back against the wall and waited.

Her heart was in her throat and she became a statue of fear and silence.

On, on, came the unseen.

The girl held her breath as he approached.

At last in the dim light of the place she saw a human figure.

It approached the door of the detective's office and halted there.

Lucy leaned forward on tiptoe, then she sprung toward the man with a cry that sounded the full length of the hall.

" Captain Javert! Thank God!"

CHAPTER XV.

EXIT JAVERT.

A HAND quickly thrown out seemed to meet the girl half way.

Was the man Javert the detective, and had he come back at last and just when he was needed most?

The light was too dim for Lucy to see clearly the features of the man whom she had called Javert, but she was certain that she had made no mistake.

In a moment she found herself in the office locked a little while before, and then she knew that she had discovered the right man.

" Well, my little one, what does Juliette think of me?" asked the sleuth with a smile. " I'm a poor clew-finder in her opinion, am I not?"

" Juliette thinks of nothing now," was the answer, and Lucy's voice dropped to a whisper. " I fear my mistress is dead."

The last word found a sudden echo on the detective's tongue.

" Dead?—Juliette?" he exclaimed. " Could I have prevented if I had escaped sooner from the web?"

Lucy shook her head.

" She came home stricken with the fatal malady," said she.

" Tell me all, girl."

Calming herself in the presence of the man whom she trusted, Lucy narrated everything that had occurred to her since the last interview.

Before she concluded daylight stole into the office and the streets of Gotham again began to swarm with human life.

Javert listened attentively to every word that fell from Lucy's tongue. The narrative seemed to possess a singular charm for him, especially that part connected with Juliette's return home, and the visit of Captain Pygmy, the dwarf.

" You will come with me now and take the trail from the house, will you not?" eagerly asked the girl, and her eyes filled with astonishment when the detective slowly shook his head.

" Javert is out of the game," said he.

Lucy started.

" What! out of the play?" she exclaimed. " If Juliette is dead you have still a mission I should think. Captain Javert, won't you become my detective? I have no money to offer; but I have a name to be cleared. I want to know who I am, I want the secret Captain Pygmy professes to know. Who is he? You have promised Nora Raymont to take the trail of the woman who left General Raymont dead in the library when she left the house. Do you desert her when you tell me that you have left the trail? The web into which you fall must have exerted a strange influence. I did not think you could be coaxed from the trail by anything."

Lucy Lemon spoke with some bitterness which sent a flush to her temples. At the end of her last sentence she rose to go.

" You don't trust me, I see," smiled Javert.

" You won't let me," was the answer. " If you have left the game, have you not destroyed my faith in you? I may find some one who will not quit the trail thus."

" You mean that you intend to make a fight for Captain Pygmy's secret."

" I do!" said Lucy firmly. " I am now an interested party in this strange drama of crime. I know that I am but a girl without money and without influence. I cannot hire sleuths as Nora can. She has unlimited wealth at her command, and she is bent on vengeance. Cap-

tain Pygmy is a man of mystery and a cunning fox who is playing a game of his own. He is working me for his purposes as best he can. I have had my eyes opened within the last few hours. If you work for the money there is in this case, go to Nora and bind yourself to her. I am sure I will find Juliette dead when I get back. Her death absolves you of the oath you took to serve her. Yes, I am almost certain that Zubiano the Sorceress brought her home. She went to consult that woman when she went away. Beyond this I know nothing, Captain Javert.

Lucy drew toward the door followed by the detective's look till she put her hand on the knob.

"One word, girl," said he raising a finger above the table at which he sat. "I am going away. That is, Captain Jack Javert, the Independent Sleuth, disappears from view to-day. In the first place remember that you have not seen him for several days. If Juliette has recovered and overwhelms you with questions, recollect that you know nothing."

The girl looked at the detective with a question at her lips, but her surprise kept it back.

"Will you do this, Lucy?" continued Javert.

"I will. Though you will not help me, I will be true to your secret, Captain Javert."

She waited for him to speak again, but as he did not she opened the door and passed out, going down the steps with a brain full of perplexing thoughts.

"What has changed Javert?" she asked herself. "I wonder what sort of web he has been in that he so suddenly quits the trail, and now he disappears altogether! Does he also desert Nora and her money? Ah! they say one can buy these detectives off! Has somebody bought Javert?"

Lucy was not herself till she got back to Juliette's house again.

She unlocked the front door and stole in on tiptoe.

There was a weird silence in the dark corridor, and an unseen hand appeared to hold her back from the room where she had left her mistress and Captain Pygmy beside her.

But the girl, with more courage than usually comes to one of her years in time of need, opened the parlor door and went forward.

"Lucy, child, is it you?"

The young girl came to a halt at the voice.

It had an unnatural sound, yet it seemed to belong to Juliette. Lucy could not tell why.

She crossed the rich carpet to the couch where she had left Juliette, but there was no one there.

"I am in here, child," said the same voice at her left, and Lucy turned toward the curtain which separated her from the private chamber.

She put up her hand and drew it aside.

A light dazzled her eyes, and stopped her on the threshold.

"Come forward," said the voice once more. "You were not here when I came home, but never mind."

Lucy saw the white face of Juliette above the arms of a covered chair, at a desk near the curtained bed.

She went forward and halted beside her mistress, whose eyes became fixed upon her.

"The time has come," continued Juliette. "I have come back from the dead to deliver a blow, and then to go out like a candle that is suddenly snuffed. I have been robbed again—perhaps by the woman who is in league with Satan. I have sealed a packet for the man I have chosen to deal the avenging blow. You will deliver it. Wherever Captain Javert is you must find him. You must place in his hand the weapon he is to wield. He is in my employ till I dismiss him, and I have not let him off."

Juliette spoke the last words through her white teeth, and to the flashings of her jet-black eyes.

At the same time she put a hand into the desk, and took up a small packet sealed with crimson wax.

Lucy's eyes became riveted upon it from the first.

"Hold out your hand, girl."

Lucy obeyed.

"This goes to the sleuth," resumed Juliette placing the object in the girl's palm. "Remember! it must find him despite all intervening obstacles. It must not go to him by any other hand than yours. My curse rest on your head if you fail!"

"But I may not be able to find Javert," said Lucy recalling the interview in the detective's office.

"Don't say that!" cried Juliette. "There must be no failure. The clew is in that packet—the secret is sealed with the red wax. It will give Captain Javert all the links of the chain and render it complete. You must succeed! Don't intimate that Javert cannot be found. The packet in your hand must reach him if he be at the ends of the earth. I tell you it avenges and destroys. It cuts the web of the Golden Spiders and strips the young queen of money who has just followed the nabob prince to the tomb."

"Nora!" ejaculated Lucy.

"Ah! what made you think of her?" exclaimed

ed Juliette. "Yes, Nora, if you would know! The secret I deliver to Captain Javert my sworn sleuth makes the rich poor and the poor rich. I don't care if she has placed him on the trail of the general's slayer. I have done more than that. I have thrown the slayer into his hands, and placed victory in his power. Why do you look at me that way, girl? I know I'm not the woman I was before I went to the den of the spider-witch of New York. I have ceased to be Juliette. I am Queen Leo once more. Let me alone, and take the secret to Javert the shadow."

Lucy was pushed back beyond the curtain by a hand that seemed to burn where it touched.

"Go now!" cried Juliette. "Don't say that you can't find Javert. You can and you must! You carry your own destiny in your hand; you are my messenger of vengeance and justice. If you fail I'll come back and make it hot for you!"

The aspect of the woman was enough to drive the frightened and bewildered girl away.

She bid the packet with the crimson seal in her bosom, and as the curtain fell back biding Juliette from view, her feet carried her away.

"I know what he said, but he may be there," thought Lucy, reaching the sidewalk in a moment. "I want to get rid of this unpleasant duty as quickly as possible. I don't want a charge like this very long."

She went back over the way to Javert's office as speedily as possible. Excitement and fear seemed to lend speed to her progress.

With nimble feet she bounded up-stairs, and paused out of breath at the little office door.

Not two hours had elapsed since she left Javert there, and yet there was a placard above the knob, and she read thereon this inscription:

"FOR RENT, INQUIRE AT END OF HALL."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRAIL OF THE SPIDER.

If the reader could have walked along a certain street in Gotham celebrated for being the abode and place of business of a class of persons who get money from the credulous by pretending to disclose the future—if the reader could have done this, we say, several days after the events of the chapters just finished, he might have seen a hard-faced, though well-dressed woman surrounded by people of all sorts.

Behind this woman stood a brick house, not so much unlike its neighbors as to be singled out for anything unusual. The shutters were closed, and there was an air of vacancy about the premises which the surrounding dwellings did not possess.

"Yes, here is where Zubiano the Seeress did live," said the woman to her hearers. She particularly addressed a smallish man with a red beard and a very prominent watch-chain. "She isn't here now, though, and I think I've told that often enough. She paid her rent like a lady—paid more than she agreed to, and in that respect I'll recommend her anywhere. No, I don't know where she went."

"Could she tell fortunes, or was she just playing in with the art?" asked the little man.

"I think she understood her business from the fixings she had," was the reply. "I'm not prepared to say why she didn't remain longer. She rented the house by the month and had a right to vacate before the time was up if she wanted to."

The listeners departed one by one, until the woman on the step and the red-whiskered man were the only ones left.

"Did you want to consult Zubiano?" asked the owner of the house addressing the man.

"I would like to have seen her."

"In a business sense, I presume?" smiled the woman.

"You'll find Signor Chozzi the Seventh Son down the street, and Madame Stella next door."

"Do you think either of these would do when I wanted Zubiano, your renter?"

"Perhaps not; but you've heard me say that she is gone."

"When did she go?"

"Yesterday at ten o'clock."

"In broad daylight, then?"

"Yes; she did nothing to make her go at night, I guess."

"Ob, no, of course not," returned the man. "She didn't give you the slightest clew to her future intentions, I presume, Mrs.—"

"Mrs. Harebell—Julia Harebell. No, she told me nothing, and when my renters act fair I ask no questions. Isn't that right, sir?"

"Perfectly right," admitted the man. "I may find the seeress elsewhere. Am sorry you can't direct me, Mrs. Harebell. Don't let me detain you, for you are a woman of business, I see." And the speaker touched his hat in a cavalier manner not expected of him, and walked away with a smile forming on his lips to the twinkle in his eye.

A few minutes afterward he entered a room where he disturbed a man lying on a sofa, and when this person sprung up with an exclamation of pleasure the red whiskers were dashed to the floor and the little man became quite another person.

"Well, captain, it's a clean move off and no clew left!" he exclaimed.

"You don't tell me, Xerxes," was the response. "Couldn't you pick up a single link?"

"Not one!" growled Xerxes whom we have met before.

Zubiano left between watches leaving not a shadow behind. She kept her own counsel and played her own game. Mrs. Harebell, her late landlady, knows no more than we do, and you know what our information is."

The man who had settled back upon the sofa and who was Captain Cinnabar, the Californian, looked curiously at his spy for a second and then crossed his legs while he laughed.

"She suspects," said he. "Zubiano believes that we are after her. Heaven knows how she found it out, but I am confident that she took flight at our shadows."

"Not at mine, captain," retorted Xerxes with some show of spirit.

"Certainly not at mine," said Cinnabar. "I have let you and Monte do the hunting. As for Captain Pygmy, who got out of our web by prying up the floor, I don't think he frightened her away. The dwarf hasn't been seen since I left him in the room."

"Neither has the detective, eh?"

Xerxes showed his teeth at the end of the sentence.

"You are right, Xerxes. I never knew of anything more opportune."

"What do they say, now?"

"Just what they've been saying all along; an accidental fire, nobody to blame, and no charges."

The faces of the two men as seen in the light that came through the slats of the shutters were a study, they were so alike in triumph and cunning.

All at once the little man espied the spurned mask on the floor.

"Shall I put this on and try again, captain?" he asked, touching the odd looking contrivance with his foot.

"I would like to find her," Cinnabar replied. "She is the woman who dealt the mysterious blow which ended Raymont's career. I am almost satisfied of this. Nora is still determined to hunt her down. Of course her detective is not on the trail, but, as Monte discovered last night, she has probably put another one on the trail. You know what passed between us at our last interview. She knows that I was Colonel Nero's captain in the days of the Spider League. She says boldly that she will beggar herself restoring Raymont's millions to the right parties, if she can find them. The girl is determined. She may go to the far West with some shrewd sleuth and take up the clew from the beginning. Our web is damaged in several places, but it is still strong."

"Look here, Xerxes," continued Cinnabar, without giving his companion a moment in which to get in a word. "General Raymont, or Colonel Nero, was worth two millions and a half at the time of his death. A good deal of that sum, according to Nora's belief, arrived at by a perusal of certain papers found in the house, belongs to the heirs of the woman who once owned the Don Pedro Mine."

"But there were no heirs, captain," cried Xerxes.

"You couldn't convince Nora to that effect," smiled the Californian.

"But I ought to know."

"Yes."

"It was I who followed her to the end of the game."

"I know that."

"The tigress left no whelps, Captain Cinnabar."

"True; but prove it to Nora's satisfaction, if you can."

The spy of the golden web shrugged his shoulders.

"I sha'n't try it," cried he. "I am taking care of Zubiano just now."

"And you have lost her already."

"Don't laugh at me," said Xerxes; "I lost the other one in the mountains more than once, but I found her at last. But the sleuth, Monte, says he saw—What of him, captain?"

"Monte is on the watch, and we must wait till he reports."

"If Nora has got a new detective the web must catch him, too," exclaimed the spy. "I looked in at Javert's office this morning. It is still for rent, which is proof enough that the thrall held that fly. Juliette's house is shut up, and the girl she took from the street to raise is gone—back to the streets, I reckon."

"Whom do you think Juliette was, Xerxes?" asked Captain Cinnabar.

"Now, that's a poser," was the response.

"Captain Pygmy was interested in her."

"And in the child, too, for he held secret interviews with her in the Park. I never could wholly make Juliette out. I know General Raymont went to see her often."

"Xerxes, did it ever occur to you that Juliette was the woman who, years ago, as Queen Leo, rode into Camp Satan and claimed Colonel Nero as her husband?"

Instantly the gray eyes of the little man seemed to change color, and his look became an astonished stare.

"I—never—thought—of—that!" he gasped.
"You've seen Juliette?"
"I have."
"But noticed no resemblance between her and Queen Leo?"

"Captain, that was long ago, sure enough, and we change a good deal in twenty years. Juliette, Queen Leo?"

"I did not say so. I merely asked—"

"I understand," broke in Xerxes. "But she did not get to establish her claim."

"No. A lot of hands came between."

"So they did!" grinned the little man. "But, Captain Cinnabar, what do you think of her claim?"

"At this day, Xerxes, with all that has happened?"

"Yes."

"She was right."

"And Colonel Nero, the King of the Spider League, was her husband?"

"That follows, eh, Xerxes."

"Hang me, captain, if this doesn't lay me out!" exclaimed the spy. "If Juliette was General Raymont's wife, then her heirs, if there be any, are entitled to every dollar of the millions Nora holds."

"Yes."

"I begin to see," continued Xerxes, passing his hand across his forehead. "Now, if Nora does not discover an heir, the web will win."

"That is it! Xerxes, the web must win! Because the Spider League has transferred its basis of operations to New York, it must not be baffled by a young girl and her sleuth. Captain Pygmy is at work somewhere, for because he has been in the web, he will not quit the game. Why was he interested in the child, Lucy—Juliette's protégée?"

"Immortal gods! it goes through my brain like an electric bolt!" exclaimed Xerxes.

"What does?" smiled Captain Cinnabar.

"A thought about the girl. I am off again."

"After Zubiano?"

"Yes, and on another trail at the same time."

He stooped and picked up the red whisker mask, which he adjusted to his face.

"Look out for Nora's new shadow," admonished Cinnabar.

"I will, and if I find him and get a chance, captain, I'll give him this!" And Xerxes, with an evil glitter in his eyes, drew a knife, and throwing it above his head, executed a quick downward stroke.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW WORK FOR THE WEB.

CAPTAIN CINNABAR listened with a smile on his face to the footsteps that echoed for a moment in the hall beyond the room, and then died away with the closing of a door.

"I thought I could startle Xerxes," he said to himself in audible tones. "I've given him a new idea of Juliette and put him on a new trail besides. I'll warrant that his head is still in a whirl, but he'll cool off pretty soon and get down to business again. When I called his attention to the girl Lucy who lived with Juliette how quickly he seemed to catch the straw. Let him go to the double trail he thinks of now. I will play my hand against the girl who threatens the existence of our web. If Nora has set a new sleuth on the trail, we want to know it at once. It is time Monte should be here."

A minute later the musical tinkle of a bell came into the room, and Captain Cinnabar caught and jerked a little cord that dangled above his head.

He was answered by footsteps beyond the door which he watched with eager eyes, and when it opened he saw the figure of Monte hatless on the threshold.

The man came forward and dropped into a chair at the table.

Espying an open box of cigars on the cloth he dived one hand into it and helped himself before paying any more attention to the ex-Californian.

"Smoking quiets my nerves," said he with a glance at Captain Cinnabar and a grin. "They need a sedative just now. I've been chased."

The man on the sofa sat bolt upright and stared for a moment at the speaker whose face was partially enveloped in a cloud of white smoke.

"Chased?" Captain Cinnabar echoed. "Well, I hope you haven't led the sleuth-hounds to this house."

"I'm no fool, captain," laughed Monte, somewhat irritated by the words just spoken. "The fox never gets too old to double on the hounds. I guess I got here without any one at my heels. Why don't you draw the web?"

"On whom?"

"On the girl and her detective."

Cinnabar left his sofa and crossed the space between it and the table.

"I'm going to," said he.

"When?"

"Pretty soon."

"That's indefinite," snapped Monte.

"So it is," confessed Cinnabar. "I can't name the hour just now."

"You'll have to name it soon."

"Why?"

"The sleuth is no young bound who loses the scent every now and then."

"Have you seen him again?"

Monte removed his cigar and knocked its ashes into a wooden bowl on the table.

"Have I seen him?" he echoed. "What did I say when I came in? I've been chased."

"You leave me in the dark."

"Do I, captain? I was down among the boats looking for Captain Pygmy, whom I lost there last night, as you know. All at once I became conscious that I was watched, and a little shrewd spying on my part confirmed my suspicious. Lounging among the merchandise on the wharf was a shiftless-looking man with a pipe in his mouth. I did not have to look the second time to know that he was the sleuth who had me in tow. He was playing an all-fired sleek game, but not sleek enough to hoodwink me. 'Nora's sleuth,' says I, and then I set about to baffle him. I began by moving straight toward him, as if he wasn't in Gotham at all, and I believe I nearly touched him as I passed. My idea was to get a good look at him. I wanted to photograph his eyes for future use, but hang me, captain, if he didn't keep a cloud of smoke before his face and baffle me completely. I drew him away from the bales, however, just as I knew I would do. I had him at my heels before I had fairly left the wharf. For half an hour I played with the ferret—he'd him hither and thither just for amusement, and then I got down to business. I gave him a long chase, till he must have cursed me roundly for my impudence. All at once I vanished."

"Are you sure you broke the trail beyond his taking it up, Monte?" inquired Captain Cinnabar.

"I've been tracked before," was the answer. "A man who has beaten sleuths in California ought to match them in New York. I'm no spring chicken when it comes to trails."

"I know you, Monte, and I am willing to accept your report. But what about Captain Pygmy whom you lost last night?"

"He is lost still, but I think I picked up a clew to-day."

"A real clew, Monte?"

"Yes." Monte unbuttoned his coat and drew forth a bit of paper which he handed to Captain Cinnabar without opening it.

"That," said he, "I found to-day among the ashes on the hearth of the room which Captain Pygmy occupied less than a fortnight ago. You see that it was thrown to the fire along with a lot of other things, perhaps, but the flames preserved it for my fingers."

Captain Cinnabar unfolded the paper the edges of which were scorched and looked at it intently.

"Who is the person whose name I see here?" he asked, glancing through his long lashes at Monte.

"I found that out the first thing I did," was the laughing response. "Mr. Noel Nixon is Nora's friend—the adviser behind the throne, captain."

"Do you think so?" ejaculated Cinnabar, a cloud settling over his brow.

"That's my opinion. The young man is a well-to-do person about twenty-five, and a lawyer who doesn't seem to care whether he has any clients or not. I followed up the clew as soon as I had found it, and I might call myself one of his clients just now. It didn't take much cheek, captain. I represented that I had been chiseled out of some honest wages by a fictitious employer, and I stated my case so plausibly that I think I'll get my money inside of ten days. Noll Nixon thinks so, too, ha, ha."

Captain Cinnabar set a smile against Monte's laugh, and the spy taking fresh breath, continued:

"He's a shrewd, good-looking chap—just about the sort I would expect a handsome young woman like Nora to like. I don't know what Captain Pygmy was doing with his address, nor why he tried to destroy it; but I found it on the hearth in the condition it is now in your hands. While I was talking to Nixon a young lady passed the door and went into the private room adjoining. It was Nora."

"Are you certain of this, Monte?"

"My eyes never deceive me. Don't cause me to distrust them, captain, because a great deal depends on them just now."

"How long did Nora stay?"

"About an hour. Her coming took me out, but I waited and watched below till the lawyer handed her into her carriage at the curb."

Cinnabar folded the paper and put into his pocket.

"I'll try a hand now," said he, a lurking smile appearing at the corners of his mouth. "I think we'll tighten the web. I've just sent Xerxes away on a new trail. He's lost Zubiano."

"The witch, eh?" cried Monte.

"Yes, the so-called Queen of Sorcery," replied Cinnabar.

"Maybe I could give Xerxes a pointer, though his trail is not mine."

"Give it to me, Monte."

Monte leaned toward Captain Cinnabar and

rested his chin on the hands which he deposited on the edge of the table.

"If Zubiano has cleverly given Xerxes the slip, she has crossed my path," said he.

"The deuce she has!" cried Cinnabar falling back.

"It was accidental," resumed Monte. "While the sleuth of the wharf was chasing me, I saw a woman alight from a closed carriage and enter a certain house which stands in a queer neighborhood for fashionable people. I got one glimpse of her face, but that was enough. You know I've seen the woman whose short career as Zubiano the Sorceress has been so eventful. Well, the face I saw between carriage and step was hers. If Xerxes has lost the trail I think I can help him."

Cinnabar of the Spider League hung breathless on Monte's narrative as it fell from his lips.

"Give me the clew. Tell me where you saw this woman!" cried he bending forward with eyes that fairly danced with eagerness. "I want to know where she is. I must know. I've got a hand for that woman and a special web for her schemes. With Zubiano, as she calls herself, in this game, we have no real assurances of success. You know what she has already done. She killed General Raymont, our old Colonel Nero, with a mysterious agent which she can handle with ease; and Juliette who was found dead in her private chamber met her shortly before the tragedy. Where is she, Monte?"

Monte saw the poorly suppressed excitement that almost took Captain Cinnabar's breath.

"I saw her alight at and enter Number 444, Y— street."

"That is near the river," exclaimed Cinnabar.

"Yes, a by-street, not very stylish, but a good hiding-place for all that."

"That is enough," rejoined the Californian, falling back. "This is unexpected fortune. I can now meet the woman who played the hand that gave a new phase to our game. Do you know who Zubiano is, Monte?"

"No, captain."

"Have you tried to think?"

"Yes, but maybe my head was thick."

"I'll tell you by and by," said Captain Cinnabar leaving his chair.

"When you come back, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"Be careful! The woman I have found is dangerous if one is to judge by her work."

"I'll risk the danger," laughed the weaver of the gold web. "If Captain Cinnabar isn't a match for the shrewdest woman alive, then to Tartarus with our play for Colonel Nero's millions! Go back to your trail of Nora's detective who saw you on the wharf. Find out who he is and what he is doing. Of course he wants to find Zubiano, but he never will if I can unsuccessfully play the trumps you have just given me. By Jove! Monte, I'll give you an extra ten thousand for to-day's work."

"When will you come back, captain?"

"When the web has finished the Queen of Sorcery and the death-witch of Gotham!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HAND OF DEATH.

WHAT has become of Lucy Lemon and her quest.

Let us see.

The reader has not forgotten that we left the girl staring at the inscription "For Rent" on the closed door of Javert the detective's office whither she had gone with the sealed message from Juliette Jansen in her bosom.

The result of her mission perplexed the girl.

To be confronted by a locked door beyond which she could not see, was too much for her.

The import of the packet in crimson wax grew more startling and mysterious than ever.

She did not want to keep the secret a minute.

After awhile she went to the end of the hall whither a second sentence on the "For Rent" placard directed all inquirers.

She found there another door closed like Javert's, with the words "Janitor and Agent" painted thereon.

Lucy tried the knob, but it would not turn.

"I am too early for information. I must come again," flitted through her mind, and then she went down the stairs and into the street.

"Must I go back to Juliette with the packet undelivered?" she asked herself. "She does not expect me to come home thus. In heaven's name, what ought I to do?"

With no one to advise her, and with her torturing thoughts for unconscionable company, the strange child of Gotham walked undecided from the building.

Her steps, despite herself, tended toward Juliette's house, and before she knew where she was she found herself confronted by the building.

"I can steal in through the basement without noise," argued Lucy. "I can see what Juliette is doing, and if she is asleep, I can go away without being discovered—back to my hunt for Javert the sleuth."

The girl followed her line of reasoning. She stole down the steps leading to the basement door to which she had a key in the pocket of her dress.

Opening the portal without noise, she let her small figure inside.

A deathlike stillness pervaded the house, and there were shadows everywhere which the growing morning could not chase away.

Lucy went up into the house proper on tiptoe. She glided down the ghostly hall to the parlor with her heart in her throat, and her limbs shaking beneath her.

All was still in the luxuriously furnished room, and the heavy curtain hung close between the parlor and Juliette's bed-chamber.

Beyond the dark crimson folds of this curtain lay a mystery.

Lucy felt this in the depths of her soul, yet while she would have given much to have been far away at that moment, no power could have kept her from going on.

She took new breath, summoned additional courage, and went forward.

Her footfalls on the velvet carpet seemed to sound like the reports of pistol caps.

At length she put out her hand and took hold of the curtain, then she drew it aside on its wooden rings, and felt her heart stand still.

At first Lucy saw nothing, for the bedroom was dark, but in a moment she knew she was confronted by a startling presence.

It seemed to rise before her in all the ghostliness of death.

Juliette occupied the same chair in which she had left her, but now her figure was thrown back, and her head rested on the back of the seat.

One hand was clinched on her bosom as if in keeping with the deep-set agony of the white face that looked out of the semi-gloom at the staring child. The other hand hung over the arm of the chair at its owner's side, and Lucy saw that it was shut, too, but in a different manner, as if it clasped something.

All this bursting upon the girl's vision without much previous warning did not drive her back. It seemed to nail her to the spot.

"Juliette is dead!" cried Lucy, and then as if she repented of what she said, she finished with: "No! no! It cannot be."

But her first words were the terrible truth.

The chair before her held a corpse and the hand hanging over the velvet held a vial without a cork and empty.

Lucy's first thought was: "What shall I do?"

She had seen enough to drop the curtain and retire to the shadows of the parlor.

"They will find her soon enough. Juliette has killed herself, after giving me the last message she had for any one—for the detective. I don't want the police to take me up and make me tell what I know. Captain Pygmy might find me then, and I am tired of being in that man's employ. Perhaps I ought to leave the sealed packet on Juliette's table and let the police find it when they find her. No! I promised to deliver it to Javert, the detective. It was the last promise I ever made Juliette, and she has been kind to me. I ought to keep my word to her."

The girl got new courage while she thought, but she did not go back to the chamber and its dead occupant.

"I am going to keep my promise," said she, resolutely. "I don't know what has become of Javert, but I will find him! If I let the police find me they may find the packet, too, and then I could not keep my word with Juliette."

By and by Lucy stole back to the hall, and thence up to the little room she sometimes occupied.

It did not take her long to gather together her few worldly goods.

When Juliette found her on the streets she was without a home, and the possessor of no more clothes than those which covered her. Now she was but little richer, and again she was going back to the streets.

Down to the basement and up therewith to the pavement was the journey of the dead woman's protegee.

Fortunately nobody saw her emerge from the house, and when she found herself away from the building, she almost ran.

"I know nobody to whom I can go, save Tom and his mother," thought she. "The police would hardly look for me there. It is my only hope."

Carrying the dread secret of Juliette's house in her heart, and the sealed packet on the outside, the girl mystery of Gotham did not pause till she knocked timidly at a door on the top floor of a large wooden building.

When it was opened by a thin-faced woman, who opened her eyes wide at sight of her visitor, Lucy walked in and let slip a breath of relief.

"What! have you left your rich lady?" cried the woman, glancing at the little package the girl carried.

"Don't talk about her now, Mrs. Ferris," said Lucy. "I have come to stay with you awhile."

"I've invited you to come before, but you thought you was in clover with—"

The woman caught herself and stopped.

"I want a bit of paper and an envelope," continued the girl.

"I'll have to rob Tom, but he won't object when he knows why I did it."

A search in a closet brought to light the articles asked for by the girl, and in a short time she was writing at a table that shook on its insecure legs.

When she had completed her task, she went over it and read as follows:

"TO CAPTAIN KNOX, OF THE POLICE:—Please go to the house of Mrs. Juliette Jansen, No.—N—street, and see if she doesn't need help. The house is locked. You are needed there."

"ONE WHO KNOWS."

Sealing this message in the envelope, Lucy addressed it to Captain Knox of the New York police, and then looked up at Mrs. Ferris.

"You cannot read, I believe I once heard you say?" said she.

"No, and not sorry, either, for it's kept me from knowin' how much misery there is in the world," was the answer. "Why do you ask me, girl?"

"Oh, the thought just happened to enter my head. Will you go down to the drug-store, get a stamp, and drop my letter into the box?"

"Certainly, my little one," and away went Mrs. Ferris with the letter and a penny.

Lucy Lemon had no acquaintance with Captain Knox of the police. She knew there was such a person, for she had heard him spoken to by name in Union Square Park.

Beyond this he was as unknown to her as were the other thousands of the force.

The letter was promptly mailed by Mrs. Ferris, and in course of time, and very short time at that, it fell into the hands of the stalwart and handsome police captain to whom the girl had addressed it.

By such means was the city acquainted with the tragic death of Mrs. Juliette Jansen, and the papers had the usual account and speculations, with Lucy's letter to Captain Knox in fac-simile.

Tom Ferris, a boy of fifteen, bright-eyed and keen, brought a penny paper up to Lucy the next day.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "They're lookin' high an' low for the girl Mrs. Jansen took to raise. The bull police force an' all the reporters have their eyes open for you. They think you know something about the mystery of N—street. Poke yer head out o' doors, an' you're gobblin' up! Now's yer chance, of course, to become famous an'—"

"But I don't want to be found!" interrupted Lucy, growing white. "I have a secret, and a deep one at that. I want to stay here till they have ceased to look for me, and then I want to find a man!"

"Mebbe I kin help you," proffered the boy.

"No, you cannot. I have a message to deliver to a certain person—I've promised the dead to deliver it—and I shall do so if I have to turn the city inside out in my work."

"Is he connected with the mystery?"

"Not much."

"Is he related to Mrs. Jansen?"

"Tom! Tom! don't bother Lucy with questions," broke in Mrs. Ferris, and the boy reluctantly obeyed.

The next day and the next the papers reported the failure of the police to find Mrs. Jansen's protegee, and, at last, with the packet in red wax in her bosom, and still hunted, as she knew, Lucy Lemon went down the rickety steps of the tenement and glided away among the shadows of night once more to find, if possible, the trail of Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.

It was a mission that seemed futile.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLY IN THE THRALL.

LUCY'S first journey was, as a matter of course, to the office formerly tenanted by the city sleuth.

She thought that he might have come back during her biding and taken the old quarters.

Still fearful of being recognized and pounced upon by the argus-eyed police, she proceeded with caution, with her shawl so arranged about her head as to prevent recognition.

She found the same placard of "For Rent" on the office door, and the surroundings had the same empty look.

Disappointed, she went down the stair again, and once more into the street. Now she was watched. If she had baffled the police still on the lookout for Juliette's protegee, she had failed to keep out of the sight of a certain little man, whose short limbs seemed to possess the nimbleness of a monkey's.

The man kept close to Lucy, following her some distance, with his black eyes beaming with mingled delight and satisfaction. He did not appear anxious to overtake her, which he could have done at any time, but he was careful not to let her lengthen the space between them.

"I guess I've got her where I can show my hand," said the man to himself, accompanying the words with a light chuckle. "I think the child has been in hiding a couple of days, for I've watched the house along with the police, and I am sure she has not been there."

Lucy was now several yards ahead, and her pursuer suddenly quickened his gait, and one of his hands dropped lightly upon her shoulder as he said:

"My child?"

The girl broke away from the touch with a cry of alarm, and turned to see who had spoken.

"It is I," continued the man. "I've been looking for you this long while. I don't wonder that you haven't been about after what has happened."

Lucy stood trembling before the man who was the last person she wanted to meet just then. If she could have chosen she would have preferred the police.

"We're near the house fortunately. We won't take the Park for it this time; it might not be safe, you know," he went on, his hand tightening gently on her arm.

"I don't want to go. I am busy now," pleaded Lucy.

"This is business for both of us," was the response. "Let us get away from here. The police have sharp eyes, and they want you yet."

Without making an effort to get away—the grip on her arm told her that a trial would have failed—the girl allowed herself to be taken along some distance, then down a side street, and into a house which her conductor unlocked like an old tenant.

Lucy was taken into a room which was quite dark till a hand turned on the gas, when she got a better view of her captor.

She had fallen into the hands of the spider of the streets—Captain Pygmy, the dwarf!

"I'm glad I've found you," said the little man, with a broad smile. "You can let in some light on several dark places. You wouldn't have been in hiding if you didn't know something about the affair, eh, child?"

"About what affair?" asked Lucy.

"Ho! you must not try to hoodwink Captain Pygmy!" was the quick retort. "You can't get anything without his assistance. The name and the fortune will go glimmering if you don't play fair with me. Now, what do you know about the mystery?"

Lucy's one desire was to get away.

She had started out to find Javert, the detective, and here she had fallen into the accursed clutches of Captain Pygmy.

Young as she was, she had come to see that the rascal was playing some deep and adroit game of his own, that he was using her to further his own ends, and that when he had succeeded, he would laugh at the folly which had drawn her into the web.

"Did Juliette kill herself in your presence?" continued the dwarf.

Lucy drew back.

"No. I don't want to talk about the awful affair. I can't throw any light on it and—"

"Why then have you been hiding from the police?" broke in Captain Pygmy. "You don't know anything at all, and yet you shun the cops as if each one was a walking pestilence. You want to be known as quite innocent, my child; but, I'm an old fox, and they're not often caught."

His manner was insulting and his eyes full of fire.

Lucy, inspired by a resolution suddenly formed, looked at him without replying.

"Take your time; I'm here for all day if necessary," said the dwarf, crossing his legs. "I'm here for the truth, child. I want to know all that Juliette did before she died."

A thrill passed through Lucy's brain, and she thought of the packet at that moment in her bosom where it had been ever since Juliette had intrusted it to her for delivery to Javert.

"I have said that I was not there when she did the deed," said the girl.

"But you were seen to leave the house some time before. What sort of mission did Juliette send you off on?"

Lucy started.

Had Captain Pygmy a suspicion of the truth?

"Don't want to tell, eh?" he went on, before she could frame a reply. "Made up your mind to play against me, I presume? You don't want to know the secret connected with your life, nor to put your hands on the fortune."

"If they are to be mine they will come any how, no matter what I do."

"They will, hey? Girl, you have no conception of how affairs stand. When you fight against me you fight against yourself. Come! act with some discretion and tell me what you know."

"If I had known how Juliette died I would have told the police."

"No, it was not that which kept you back!" cried the dwarf. "You didn't want to be quizzed about your last relations with her. What was her last command?"

Lucy's lips seemed to meet with a firmness that irritated Captain Pygmy.

He left the chair into which he had deposited his dwarfish body and went to a window.

A sharp click followed his halt there, and then he threw a look toward the door.

"The police won't look for you here, neither will any one," said he turning upon Lucy whose wondering gaze had followed him. "It is web against web and spider against spider. I know it all, child. You've gone clean back on Captain Pygmy. You want some other one to succeed. When you left Juliette's house before she died it

was to take a message somewhere. It was not to Zubiano the Sorceress who brought your late mistress home in that terrible frame of mind which preceded her suicide. She would not send you to that woman. She sent you elsewhere, and, what is more, she intrusted you with a written document."

Lucy did not quail before the look which accompanied these words.

"You pretend to know a great deal," said she. "If all this be true, and you know it, why keep me here with these questions?"

"I want the truth."

"It is not for Captain Pygmy!"

The dwarf grew dark in the face.

"Is it open war, girl?" he exclaimed bending forward with his hands clinched and all his tiger passions aroused.

"It is what you make it," calmly answered Lucy. "I want no difficulty with any one. I shall keep my word with Juliette my late mistress."

"Ho! then you have not yet fulfilled the mission?" cried Captain Pygmy.

Lucy said nothing.

"You have made it war; not I," said he. "When you come to your senses you will retract the declaration of hostilities, for until you decide to tell the whole truth, you will be found here at all times."

The dwarf sprung across the room and his hands descended upon his young prisoner's shoulders.

Lucy saw him bending over her with blazing eyeballs, and his breath fell hot on her face.

"As I've said, there are many webs in Gotham, and this is one of them!" he hissed. "You'll know how strong its meshes are before you are through with them. Haven't you decided already to tell me what I want to know?"

"I have not!"

Captain Pygmy drew back as suddenly as he had sprung forward.

"Then, my foolish fly, you've lost everything!" cried he. "The detective whom you visited once or twice at Juliette's dictation has given up his office and disappeared. I presume he fell into the other web as I did once and perished there. He was your friend, wasn't he? Took an interest in you, at any rate. Don't fear that you will ever fall into the clutches of the police and be examined by them. I'll see that you do not. They won't look for you here, neither will the person to whom Juliette sent her last message by you. When I have played the game through and have my pockets lined with diamonds, you'll wish you had not made war against me—that is, if you are not a poor crushed, dead fly in the web at the time. You've rejected a fortune for a whim. Girl, you've tossed aside the precious secret of your life to carry out a foolish pledge to a dead woman. Well, take what comes. If it be despair, darkness and death, don't blame any one but yourself!"

Lucy saw the dwarf glide across the room and halt at the door with his hand on the knob.

His face was full of triumph, hers she felt was white.

"Guide me to Juliette's last message—to the written one, and get out of the captain's web alive," said he, in parting tones. "Keep the secret in your bosom and let the web hold you till death ends all!"

Then the door opened and shut, and the girl, suddenly deserted by courage, fell back in a faint.

CHAPTER XX.

RUN DOWN.

CAPTAIN PYGMY had surely gone, for the door did not open again to admit the dwarfish figure of the hideous man-spider to the girl lying insensible on the floor.

As to the dwarf, he had let himself out of the house and into the street.

"A few hours of imprisonment will fetch her around," said he. "I know the spirit of these young creatures. I had Lucy in my grasp as long as she was Juliette's protegee, but now, with Juliette out of the way, strange to say the girl rebels. When I come back she will be ready to tell me to whom she was to have taken Juliette's last commands. Was it to her sleuth, Jack Javert, the Broadway independent? I must know."

At the same time—to the minute, almost—Captain Cinnabar the web-weaver was inspecting a certain dwelling from the outside and with the aid of the nearest lamp.

The street was not the most respectable for residence. It was well taken up with drinking-houses and similar resorts, but here and there a better looking house stood like an oasis of green in the bleakness of a desert.

"Queer that the Queen of Sorcery should come here to renew her magic," thought Cinnabar. "Monte never makes a mistake, and if he says he saw Zubiano enter this house, I am satisfied."

Captain Cinnabar continued to eye the building for some time longer, though he did not attempt to enter.

"I'd give a good deal to be on the inside, and I assured Monte that I intended to crush the

witch of Gotham who is just now in our way. The woman who killed General Raymont cracked the web. I was just twisting Colonel Nero round my finger when she came between. Now she rejoices in her vengeance and perhaps meditates a second blow as powerful as the first. Let the girl and her new detective go for a moment. Crush the sorceress, Captain Cinnabar; play in New York a hand as deadly as the ones you used to play in the gold domain."

His own words seemed to give him courage, for he took several hasty strides toward the house and stopped at the foot of the steps before the front door.

"Why not go in like a whirlwind and astonish her with my lightning power?" cried Cinnabar. "I feel my blood burn in my veins when I find myself at last so near this mysterious and dangerous woman. Zubiano, eh? I did not dare name her to Xerxes, the old bloodhound of the Spider League. He would have called me mad and with cause, too. I startled him enough when I intimated who Juliette was and why she took such a fancy to the girl Lucy; but to have told him my private opinion of Zubiano would have been too much."

All at once, as if goaded by an impulse which he could not resist, Captain Cinnabar ran up the wooden steps and jerked the knocker.

"I'm cool enough now to go through the play without a break," he said to himself. "She doesn't look for me. Ah! some one comes!"

Footsteps beyond the door grew more and more distinct till they ceased at the portal itself and then the knob was turned.

Cinnabar drew back and waited.

The door opened at last and he saw a face and caught a glimpse of a human figure.

"It is she!" he exclaimed under his breath and then without more ado he pushed forward, opening the door wider with his body.

In a moment he was in the hall, his burly figure erect under the jet that burned overhead, and his eyes riveted upon the person who stood between him and the threshold.

That person was a woman.

She looked calmly at Captain Cinnabar though it was evident that he was the last visitor she expected.

"Well," said she with a faint smile at her lips, "you have found me again."

Cinnabar advanced a step, then bent his figure forward as if to get a better look at the face already in the light.

"Yes, Lady Panther, I have found you," was the reply.

She seemed to start at the name.

"This isn't California nor the heart of the Sierras," he went on. "You have transferred your game to New York, the metropolis of the continent."

"So have you, Captain Cinnabar," smiled Zubiano for she was the woman he had found.

The Californian shifted his position to one against the wall where he folded his arms upon his broad chest and studied her for a moment.

"Do I look like the victim of Colonel Nero's vengeance?" she asked.

"I think you do. Time has dealt kindly with you, Ximena."

The woman laughed.

"You don't forget names, Captain Cinnabar," she exclaimed.

"I could not forget yours if I would. You have been Lady Panther, California Coral, and other characters; you are now parading behind the mask of Zubiano the Sorceress. When did you learn the devil's magic?"

"After you left Camp Satan at Colonel Nero's heels to play for his millions in New York!"

"That was years ago."

"Yes, and you are as far from the millions now as then."

"Don't be too sanguine," cried Cinnabar. "You ought to know that the webs I weave catch the fly in the end. The golden insect avoids the thrall a long time, but with the certainty of fate it falls into it and becomes my prey. You had to put your hand forward and strike down your old enemy with the vengeance of the tigress which never forgives."

"I?" cried Zubiano.

"You."

"When did I touch him?"

"Perhaps you did not touch him in one sense of the word. You sought his presence in his own house. You knew that General Raymont was Colonel Nero, the old head of our famous Spider League of the Sierras. Heaven knows how long you watched him before you dealt your blow. Did you want him to round out the last million he was accumulating—to feel that he was entirely safe, and that you were but a heap of bleached bones in a valley whose location Xerxes the sworn trail dog would not reveal? One can see that you brought to Gotham the spirit you possessed in the gold country. You did not pity the beautiful child under his roof. I'd have thought you would have remembered her even when your hand was raised, but merciless to the end you went on and left him dead on the floor of his mansion."

"You accuse me, captain," smiled the sorceress.

"Do you deny?"

"No."

"I thought not. In cold language, you killed General Raymont."

"I did not know him. I hated Colonel Nero."

"It is all the same, Ximena."

"So it is. The bleached bones you have just talked about have a power in them, eh, Captain Cinnabar?"

"They can kill."

Zubiano put out her hands and looked at them with an expression of triumph on her marble face.

"These are the hands that were lifted to Heaven in the valley of death against Colonel Nero and his infamous League!" she suddenly exclaimed. "I am the woman who was tied to a horse and the horse shot dead by the man who is to-day in the service of his old master. I know that he reported to Colonel Nero that Lady Panther or *La Pantherina* as you sometimes had it was out of his way forever. From that moment he breathed freer and went from million to million as if there could be no day of retribution. Do you want to hand me over to the police with no proof that I killed your old captain? Is this your mission here to-night, Cinnabar of California?"

His look fell to her hands.

"You don't wear the ring any more?" he grinned.

"Oh! the serpent-headed bauble, which Colonel Nero's maid says she saw on my hand when she admitted me!"

"Yes, and the ring Juliette lost a short time before."

"No! my bands are clean, as you see," cried she. "As to the ring, I have no use for it now. When Colonel Nero saw it flashing its baleful eyes in his gaslight, he must have known that the dawn of the morning of vengeance had come. He must have wondered how his lost betrothal ring came to be on my hand."

"His betrothal ring, woman?" echoed Captain Cinnabar.

"Yes; he placed it on Juliette's hand when he won her. When she came to Camp Satan as Queen Leo, and claimed her husband, she was seized by the Spider League, with Captain Cinnabar at the head of it, and searched for the snake-eyed ring. Ah! I see you smile. The event has not escaped your memory. Juliette sent him word once that the ring would come back some day, and so it did; but not on the hand he looked for."

"You killed Juliette, too," accused Cinnabar.

"No. I stop at her door," was the answer.

"She took her own life."

"She visited you a short time before."

"Which of your sleuths told you this—Xerxes or Monte?"

"Never mind. You do not answer me."

"I will. Juliette saw me, not knowing my identity. I took her home, and in the privacy of her house she took the fatal draught. I struck the old enemy. I was ready to let Juliette live. She had something to live for—her child!"

"She has no child, unless—"

Captain Cinnabar's sentence seemed to be broken by the woman's look.

"Let me finish your sentence, captain," responded the sorceress—"unless Nora is that child! Isn't that it, my Captain of the Spider League?"

Cinnabar did not answer.

"Hug that delusion to your heart," continued Zubiano. "Sometimes the spider finds the wrong fly in the web."

Cinnabar started from the wall and colored.

"Isn't Nora the child of Raymont and Juliette?" he exclaimed.

"Put your twin sleuths on the track of the mystery. Set them on the trail!" cried the sorceress, her eyes full of a fierce fire. "They are famous for ferreting out people and things. Xerxes hunted Lady Panther down once. The time may come for the prey to hunt the hunter."

Captain Cinnabar bit his lip over his failure.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TERRIBLE MISSILE.

THIS was the woman whom he had come to crush.

Standing before him within reach of his eager hands, she was looking defiance into his eyes, even laughing over the vengeance she had taken on General Raymont, *alias* Colonel Nero.

Captain Cinnabar had been more successful than either Nora the heiress or her detective.

He had found the subtle murderer while they were yet groping in the dark.

Monte's keen eyes had found her—by accident, it is true—but nevertheless she had been found, and that was enough.

Now, could he play his hand and put her out of his way forever, for while she stood in it, the millions of the game—Raymont's millions—would never gild the meshes of the Spider League.

Cinnabar thought fast while he stood face to face with the woman whom he had run down.

The time had come for action, but where should he begin?

Truth is, the man, despite his courage, was superstitious. He did not know what sort of magic Zubiano had acquired since she had

enacted the role of Lady Panther among the gold-camps of California.

He recalled the electric button, by touching which in his own house, he had sent Javert the sleuth shocked and nearly dead from the window and into the street.

What sort of death magic did not the witch of Gotham control?

Once he was on the eve of dashing at the fair stretch of throat displayed to his gaze, but in a moment he had altered his mind.

Zubiano stepped back at last, and Captain Cinnabar by sudden impulse followed her up.

"Woman," he cried, his intention reflected in his glowing eyes before his lips could announce it. "I've come to make ultimate victory certain for the League. You have thrown your card and it has killed. You have used your black art to make Juliette lift her hand against herself. It is your last triumph."

"Hal say you so, Captain Cinnabar?" was the response, as the figure of the sorceress seemed to increase in stature.

"You can't go to the end of the game. I stand in your way!"

The following moment he cleared the already cramped space between them and the hand which she threw up was instantly encircled by a bunch of brown fingers.

He seemed strong enough to hold Ximena there with no effort on his part, and his blazing eyes without a ray of mercy in them looked down at her with the cruelty and ferocious glare of a hawk.

One of the woman's hands was free and the captain's grip appeared to burn its way through flesh and muscle below the other.

"This is not the Sierra country, Ximena," cried he. "Here there is no Xerxes over-confident to leave you for dead though lashed to a steed already shot. I am the executioner now. I am the same Cinnabar who in other lands and under other circumstances handled enemies, men and women, without gloves. If you doubt it be convinced!"

Tighter grew the inhuman clutch at Zubiano's wrist; she was forced back almost to the wall.

Not a cry escaped her welded lips.

It was look for look, silent suffering and deadly defiance.

"Did you really think to win against me?" laughed Captain Cinnabar. "With Colonel Nero dead behind you did you forget that his old captain was still in the way. The girl and her detective have failed to find you. They didn't know where to hunt, Ximena; they were doomed to failure from the first."

The sorceress of Gotham threw up the hand he had left free and covered him with a pointing finger.

"Loosen your grip!" said she, at which he laughed. "You are in a trap as fatal to your League as any you ever set for others. Unlock your fingers, Captain Cinnabar, for this is a game which more than one can play at."

He did not answer beyond giving Zubiano a look which seemed to tighten the grip he had obtained.

At that moment the woman looked up the stairs which running upward from the hall lost their landing in darkness overhead.

"Zeo!" she called, and her voice was lost above the steps and in the dim light there.

In a second an answer came back.

"I am here!"

Captain Cinnabar turned his head and caught sight of a pair of feet on one of the steps. They were small and shapely and with the voice he had just heard told him that a young woman had answered the witch's summons.

Zubiano took another breath.

"Light the pyramid, Zeo, and let us see whose victory it is," she commanded in her same cool tones.

Cinnabar of California felt a strange thrill pass through his brain.

"Obey your mistress and I will throw her dead at the foot of the stair!" he sent up to the person near the landing.

"Never mind, Zeo. You have but one duty to perform. Light the pyramid!"

The chief of the Spider League saw the feet overhead disappear and then he heard the report of a match.

"What studied deviltry is this?" he asked, turning to the woman in his grip.

"Wait till the cone burns," was the response.

A light was now blazing at the top of the stair, and Captain Cinnabar at one glance saw a young girl applying the tip of a flame to a little pyramidal shaped object which she held between thumb and finger.

It was a scene which riveted his attention, for the girl was sylph-like in figure and handsome, and her singular action was enough to hold him spellbound.

Ximena or Zubiano was not watching the girl above as she was regarding him. The fire readily took hold of the cone.

A grayish smoke rose from the apex and was blown away by the girl. It increased in volume till the whole of the pyramid seemed to be burning though no flame was visible.

"Cast it from you, Zeo," said Ximena. "And, mind you, don't miss the mark!"

Instantly the person on the steps leaned for-

ward and held the strange missile above her head.

Captain Cinnabar almost forgot his captive and the game he had come to play. He saw nothing but the girl on the stair and the smoking object in her hand. It was a moment of terrible suspense.

Suddenly the cone left the uplifted hand and came down, smoking and twisting, toward him like a missile of destruction!

"To Tartarus with the witch and her magic!" cried the Californian, and then the pyramid struck him on the breast where it broke, separating into a hundred particles, each of which at once clung to him like scorpions and all sending up all the time an odor, disgusting and suffocating.

At the same time Zubiano jerked back and was free before he could get a new grip.

"Fight it out with the secret of the witches, captain!" she laughed. "The spider sometimes finds himself in a web as strong as his own. When you have a hand and a good one, don't hold it too long before you play it."

She was on the lowest step of the stair when she finished her last sentence, and the hand he had lately held in a clutch of iron was covering him like a revolver.

"I am always armed!" continued Zubiano. "Against the old League I am doubly protected. When you have fought the death cone to a finish, know that Ximena still lives to pay every man of the Spider Conclave back!"

Up the steps with the alertness of a gymnast ran the witch of Gotham toward the girl who with the coolness of an Amazon was lighting a second cone.

Captain Cinnabar, driven back to the wall again, was trying to pluck the horrible pieces of he knew not what from his person.

"No more, Zeo! The one is enough!" he heard the woman say, and then he saw her hand fasten on the young girl's hand and draw it back.

By this time the hall where he stood was filled with an odor which was rapidly overpowering him.

"Play your hand out, captain!" laughed Ximena, in derision. "If you fail now, remember that the drama closes soon."

The Californian started toward the stair with an oath on his tongue.

"Let him come up, Zeo," said Zubiano. "I shall be pleased to see Captain Cinnabar where we stand."

But the madman did not advance far.

With a fierce exclamation he stopped midway up the steps, and then fell against the wall.

His eyeballs seemed to start from his head, his veins were on fire, and his lungs were filled with the fumes of the noxious vapors emitted by the deadly cone.

Above he saw the triumphant eyes and the beautiful face of the woman he had followed too far.

The former seemed to dance before his vision like demon stars.

It was too much for even the brave Cinnabar of the Sierras.

Suddenly he threw himself almost headlong down the steps, and thence to the door.

Self-preservation was now uppermost in his mind.

He sent no words of future battle or vengeance up to the woman standing beside her assistant in black magic on the steps.

He seized the knob and summoned all his strength to the task before him.

Cinnabar had the power of a Sampson, and knew how to put it to use.

Now the door yielded, a cracking noise told of the breaking of the lock, and as he wrenched open the portal and threw himself out with an exclamation of joy as the night air struck him, he heard behind a double laugh of victory.

CHAPTER XXII.

"EYES LIKE JAVERT'S."

FAIRLY out of the house, but not yet altogether himself, Captain Cinnabar stood still for a few moments and inhaled the night air which cleared his lungs and restored his lost strength.

Behind him was the house from which he had just fled from the power of the woman he had expected to crush.

All question of Zubiano's identity was now at an end. She was the woman who long before had played a memorable hand in California where she had been vanquished by Colonel Nero and the Spiders' League.

Cinnabar, who all along had had an opinion of his own, was now confirmed in it, and he saw that he had to face and to fight a creature whose oath of revenge, taken under the most terrible circumstances, and far from Gotham, would spur her on to something desperate.

If Ximena had killed General Raymont, would she not turn on Nora, the heiress, and by her tragic death prevent him, Captain Cinnabar, from touching a dollar of the millions which were the stakes of the game?

With his brain full of such thoughts as these, the Californian walked away.

"There must be sharp work now," he said. "Xerxes thinks he finished Lady Panther, when

he left her lashed to her dead steed in the unknown valley. She is here, against us as before. Shall I intrust this work to him? If you want a thing well done, do it yourself. Isn't that good advice? But, confound it, I've just failed myself. Her devilish magic was too much for me, but then I had not prepared myself for anything of that kind."

One hour later, the Californian caught up with a man who was hurrying along a street, and before the pedestrian knew he was seen, he had a word whispered in his ear:

"Monte!"

He looked around, and caught Cinnabar's eye.

"Captain," he responded. "What is it?"

"Let us go down to the house. You have made a discovery, Monte?"

"I have. Does my face show it, eh?"

Cinnabar langbed, and the two soon afterward entered a house, the door of which the Californian unlocked.

Entering a room in which we have seen the pair before, Cinnabar threw himself upon a sofa, while Monte of the dark face, leaned against the table and looked on.

"I have seen Nora's sleuth-hound," said the spy.

"At last—the true spy, Monte?"

"Yes."

"If I did not know something, I would believe that Jack Javert had risen phoenix-like from his ashes."

Captain Cinnabar instantly sprung up, and in a second the sofa had no tenant.

"I know what happened," Monte continued, with a curious smile. "The house which held the detective in a trap caught fire accidentally, and was destroyed. Long ago the debris has been removed, and the owner of the property has received his insurance. We know that Captain Pygmy, our deformed foe, escaped from the web that held him; but Javert, who fell from the window when you touched the electric button, did not fare so well."

"Why all this, Monte?" exclaimed Cinnabar, with an impatient gesture.

"I was just recalling two events," grinned the spy. "I say, captain, that if I did not know that Javert the Independent Sleuth shared the fate of his trap, I would believe that he was still in Nora's employ."

"He cannot be!"

"That is true."

"But what have you seen?"

"I have been to Nora's house."

"Inside?"

"Inside."

"Well?"

"I went there as one who had something important for the girl to hear."

"As one who had information to sell, eh?"

"Yes. I had a clew to the mystery which surrounds Raymont's death. An intimation of my errand to the good-looking girl who opened the door got me beyond the threshold in a jiffy, and in a moment I stood face to face with Nora herself. At once I began my pretty little story with a glib tongue, but she raised her hand and checked me all at once. 'I want some one else to hear you,' said Nora, and I was conducted into another room where I found a gentleman who was introduced as Mr. Powers—a person somewhat interested in the mystery. The man sat cross-legged in an arm-chair, and all the time he watched me with the keenest of eyes. It didn't take me long to discover that I was talking to Nora's detective, and then I spun my story accordingly."

"Didn't you wish yourself out of the trap, Monte?"

"A thousand times I did for the first few minutes, but when I found that I could turn the visit to some account I was glad I was into it. I was put under a perfect cross fire of questions when I had made my statement with an offer to tell the girl something definite if she would make it interesting, which she showed a disposition to do until her detective took up the game. I think I did a good bit of work if I did not sell my so-called information. I saw Nora's sleuth, and I know now whom we have to fight. Mr. Powers has Javert's eyes, captain, and that is why I said awhile ago that if I did not know that his plans with himself went up in smoke, I would be inclined to think that just now he is playing the role of Mr. Powers."

Captain Cinnabar laughed over Monte's words, but his face suddenly grew serious.

"Is Nora confident of ultimate success?" he asked.

"Under the eye of Mr. Powers she was cheerful."

"How does the girl look?"

"As beautiful as ever, if that's what you mean."

"You saw nothing of her lawyer friend?"

"Nothing."

"Monte, I've seen the Queen of Witches since you left me here," suddenly said Cinnabar.

"Ah! did you find Zubiano?" cried the spy.

"I found her."

"And kept your word, I presume? You found her dangerous and left her harmless in the web."

A flush of mingled madness and disappointment darkened Captain Cinnabar's face.

"I left her with a laugh of victory on her lips," he growled.

"Hal did she beat you, captain?"

"Yes, and not for the first time, either," was the reply.

Monte did not speak again, but looked at Cinnabar and waited in silence for his explanation and narrative.

"I got a confession from the witch," he continued. "She killed General Raymont because of the oath which she took years ago on a dead horse."

The spy uttered a strange cry.

"Then you found Lady Panther alive!" he exclaimed.

"I found the woman who gave us trouble once when we were at the height of our reign in the Sierras. She is the trouble now, as then, and Lady Panther, or Ximena, is capable of breaking our web by another stroke of the mysterious power which finished Raymont's career and dragged Juliette, against her will, to suicide. Monte, wait till I get through. Xerxes did his best once but he failed. He believes today that he left Ximena doomed in a valley whose location he calls his own great secret. Let him think so. Tell him different now and you unsteady his hand and throw him from the trail he is on. He is after the child whom Juliette partly adopted—the girl, Lucy, in whom Captain Pygmy took such a lively interest. Xerxes always finds, and he will find the child though she has baffled the police ever since Juliette's death. Let him keep to his trail. We will take the other, and play our hand out to the blocking of this woman's game."

"I am with you, Captain Cinnabar. If Lady Panther is here, she has raised her hand against every one of us."

"So she has. The Spider League took charge of her when she came into its domain, and when she broke away as she did, you know, Colonel Nero detailed Xerxes to run her down and then to report. Xerxes did this to Colonel Nero's satisfaction. When he saw Ximena before him, under his roof here in Gotham, he realized that Xerxes failed. Now"—Captain Cinnabar came forward and laid one of his sleek brown hands on his lieutenant's arm, while eye encountered eye—"now, Monte, old pard and faithful friend, we have a duty to perform."

"I'm with you, captain."

"The woman must die!"

Cinnabar's lips met firmly behind his declaration, to which there was no audible response, though the eyes that looked into his spoke a mute language not hard to understand.

"Let the secret and the compact be between us," the Californian went on. "Xerxes need not know how he failed in the Sierras, nor how we finished his task here in Gotham. The girl, Nora, and her detective are dangerous enough, but with Ximena out of the way the millions of Colonel Nero fall into our laps. I'm not afraid of the girl. She threatened to unearth the work of the League in California, but her affection for General Raymont will hold her back, because an expose of our deeds there brings the general before the world as Colonel Nero. Her detective can be met and balked when we have finished Ximena. Captain Pygmy can be found at almost any time. Xerxes will find the child, Lucy. In her lies our success. The girl is worth a fortune. Juliette knew it, and if Zubiano had not struck, she would have beggared Nora by producing her own offspring! For a secret right here, Monte—Lucy, the waif, is General Raymont's child by Juliette—the wife he rejected in Camp Satan. Now let Xerxes run her down, and we will have the hand that will rake the golden chestnuts from the fire, for us. Nora will compromise on what we ask, or, if she refuses, we'll make her a beggar and expose her origin. Hurrah for the old League, Monte! We step between Lady Panther and her next blow, and, with her hand rendered useless, we move on to the millions of our old leader! Come, let us drink to our success. Down with the witch of two shores! Found in the Sierras, killed in Gotham!"

Captain Cinnabar turned away and unlocked a sideboard in the wall. Taking therefrom a bottle and two glasses, he placed them on the table and the twain poured out a quantity of liquor.

The next minute glass touched glass with musical clink, and Captain Cinnabar and his pard drank to mutual success for the last time.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RIVER TRAIL.

MONTÉ in telling the story of his visit to Nora's home and his encounter with the person believed to be her new detective had omitted a very important part of the narrative.

If he had used his eyes cleverly after quitting the house he might have discovered that the gentleman who had eyes like Javert's had left it also, and he might have had an adventure in which he would have had a chance to display some shrewdness.

Unwittingly Monte led Mr. Powers to the very house where we left him at the end of the foregoing chapter drinking with Captain Cinnabar confidion to Lady Panther's schemes.

The observing eyes of the new detectives beamed brilliantly in a young head on old shoulders.

"An important conference; I presume between two of the coolest rascals in the city," exclaimed Mr. Powers as he walked away from the building which had received the pards. "Monte will retail his story to Captain Cinnabar and then they will lay their plans for a swoop. I'll go back to the trail in which Nora is so much interested just now. We've picked up several important links lately and I must get another before morning. The pards won't play no hand before them and I have a night before me for some sleepless Vigilance."

He left Cinnabar and Monte to themselves and disappeared.

Half an hour later this same Mr. Powers sat in the back corner of a well patronized tap-room watching a curious looking little man who seemed to be waiting for some one while he slowly emptied a generous glass of beer.

He had been eying the small man for ten minutes and the glass was barely half empty.

"Hello! Is he tired of his vigils!" ejaculated Mr. Powers. "Is he going to give me another chase just when I had made up my mind to make a night of it here? Your man did not come according to agreement, Captain Pygmy, and I presume I could not fill his place."

When the little customer left the table it was observed that he was somewhat deformed, with unnaturally raised shoulders and a large head. His movements were quick, however, and his eyes preternaturally bright, and he seemed to have seen everybody in the room even to Mr. Powers in the corner.

Nora's detective left his half-drained glass and started out after the dwarf.

It was difficult to keep him in sight for his nimble figure dodged in and out among the crowds under the lamps like a weasel, and then he had a quick gait which puzzled one to keep up with him.

"Take your time to it, captain, and don't lose your head," laughed Mr. Powers. "You can't shake me any more than you can cast off your shadow. I've followed weasels before now, and I've found too important a one to let you slip."

Suddenly the dwarfish figure stopped at a corner and for the first time looked back.

It seemed that a suspicion of some sort had just entered his head.

Mr. Powers stopped also and stood where he could watch his prey.

The little man soon grew satisfied with his observations for he started off again as rapidly as before but in another direction.

"Toward the river, is it?" smiled Mr. Powers resuming the chase. "You are not going to the morgue again, though you are pushing for the territory from which it gets many tenants. Don't think of tiring or losing me, Captain Pygmy. It can't be done."

Mr. Powers seemed to take delight in following the dwarf.

As if Nora's last command to him had been to follow the very person whom he now pursued, he appeared determined to keep him in sight even if he led him an endless chase.

Captain Pygmy after his about-face on the corner where he had looked back went almost straight to the piers.

A cold wind came over the water rocking in the light of the stars, and the piles of merchandise on the wharf looked like ghostly pyramids.

The dwarf did not halt till he reached the very edge of a pier, and there his squatish little figure stood out in the mingled light of lamp and star.

A few feet away were piled a lot of heavy bales. These were in two piles with a narrow lane between barely wide enough to admit a man's body.

Mr. Powers got the goods between him and Captain Pygmy, and a few noiseless strides carried him to the spot and he glided into the opening.

For several seconds the dwarf looked anxiously upon the river which broke with its monotonous night swish against the heavy timbers at his feet.

Was he looking for the person for whom he had waited in vain in the tap-room, and was that person to come out of the mysterious depths of the region beyond the pier?

Suddenly Captain Pygmy got down on his knees and looked over the edge of the pier.

His shrewd eyes saw a large iron ring and staple attached to the wood, and from the former a piece of heavy rope hung downward and was lost in the water.

"Nobody comes!" exclaimed the dwarf, in tones that reached the man among the bales. "I told him to be here by a certain hour. I wish I had him by the throat!"

"That wouldn't be a welcome grip to the party gripped, captain," said Mr. Powers to himself. "Your friend, whoever he is, must have given up his part of the engagement. But hell! does the laggard come?"

The dwarf on the pier had bounded from his kneeling position and his attitude told that he had heard a sound which had attracted him.

For a second he watched toward the river, and then he bent forward again and growled:

"So you've come at last, have you? Did you think I meant this night next year?"

There was a reply which Mr. Powers could not catch, for it was accompanied by the mooring of a boat of some kind to the ring and staple while the little man looked on nearly bursting with eagerness.

"Now, come up," said Captain Pygmy.

In response to this a dark figure appeared above the pier, and when it had finished its upward crawl, the dwarf had a companion taller and more human in shape than himself.

"How's the boat?" asked Captain Pygmy.

"It's all right or I wouldn't have brought it."

"Big enough for three, eh?"

"For four if necessary."

"Be sure that it is secure for we want it here when we come back."

"It'll be here. Samson couldn't tear it from the ring."

"Good! Why didn't you come to the rendezvous?" queried the dwarf.

"I couldn't get off on time; it was simply impossible."

"Were you watched, eh?"

"Not exactly watched, but a fellow doesn't want to take any chances."

Captain Pygmy dropped his head.

"Now let me ask what have you caught?" said his companion.

"I said I wouldn't send for you till I had something worth playing for, didn't I, Felix?"

"You did."

"Well, I have found that something."

"No mistake, captain?"

"I've got too much at stake to make one. Felix, you don't need to be living from hand to mouth all the time. When a million lies in a fellow's way and he doesn't pick it up, he deserves nothing at all."

"Is the million in our way now?"

"It is."

"Then, for heaven's sake, tell me what's to be done!" cried the dwarf's companion. "When I saw you on the street the other day I said to myself: 'There's Captain Pygmy whom I once saw in the hands of a mob in the San Jacinto mines many years ago!' And the more I looked at you, captain, the surer I became that our fortunes were about to be joined once more. But when you told me that the men of the old League were here all playing in another big game and all against you, I knew that fate had thrown us together to help one another as of old."

"Right you are, Felix!" exclaimed Captain Pygmy, touching Felix on the shoulder.

"If good fortune hasn't sent you to me, I don't know what to call it. You will soon learn why I asked about your boat being able to carry three. I've got a stubborn customer on my hands—stubborn and valuable—I might say. She holds a secret which we want to get at and besides she's a living secret herself. Look to the boat before we move off. I want no mistakes made now."

The taller man got down and leaned over the wharf till Mr. Powers feared he was about to fall headlong into the waters.

He remained a moment thus, when he sprung up and reported to Pygmy that the boat was safely moored without danger of breaking loose.

"Come, then," said the dwarf. "It is time for the rest of the play."

The two men turned toward the city, and came straight toward the man among the goods.

Their figures passed through the shadow of the bales, leaving the foxlike watcher undiscovered, and he saw them go up the wharf together.

"As precious a pair of villains as ever planned a scheme or slit a throat," laughed Mr. Powers, stepping from his retreat. "I'll run the risk of losing them to render Felix's assurances of no account. They might give me the slip if I left the boat where it is, so I'll attend to it while I'm here."

Mr. Powers ran to the edge of the pier and dropped on his knees above the water.

The next second he was leaning down over the wet planks with something gleaming in his right hand.

More than one-half of his body was hanging over the wharf, and he was reaching down as far as he could."

"There!" he said, when his hand had made several sweeps from right to left. "Maybe some early reporter will catch an item about a picked-up boat. Now, Captain Pygmy and pard, I'll go back to you."

He put up his knife as he regained his feet, and having lost but half a minute in his work at the boat, he started after his game.

Three minutes later two figures turned into a certain street near the river, and not far behind them walked Nora's detective, Mr. Powers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BALKED BY A KNIFE.

CAPTAIN PYGMY led the way. He went forward with rapid strides out of one street into

another, with Felix wondering when the journey was to end.

Powers, the sleuth, did not lose sight of the two men for a single moment, but like the faithful, persevering tracker, kept close at their heels.

"Is the passenger hard to handle?" whispered Captain Pygmy's companion, leaning forward and clutching his sleeve.

"I'll let you see for yourself in a moment," was the response. "Hard to handle, eh? I fancy that you'll laugh at your inquiry when you see the bird I've caged."

"I hope so, captain. I don't want any trouble with the passenger, even if there is a million in it, because I've been behind the diamond once, and I don't want to get back."

"Pshaw!" laughed the dwarf, with a half-contemptuous glance at Felix. "I'd risk a good deal for a round million, and I'm doing it at this moment—risking my precious neck, old fellow. A gentleman who's been half-way to the morgue ought to be able to play a cool hand, beyond all chances of failure. But come on, Felix. I'll open up the cage, and show you the bird presently."

Curious to see, as his countenance indicated, Felix kept close to Pygmy, who, after a few more evolutions apparently calculated to throw any trailer off the scent, halted at the door of a modest-looking building.

He opened it with a loose key, and the two men entered.

The hall beyond the door was dark, till Captain Pygmy struck a light, after which he conducted his companion to another door.

"Here's the cage, Felix," he smiled.

"Mebbe it is empty."

The deformed plotter frowned.

"Empty?—this cage of my own building?" he exclaimed. "I'll show you in a minute the passenger we're going to take across the river in the boat."

He swung the unlocked door back with the closing of the sentence, and Felix leaned forward with eagerness, to see what the room contained.

A slight cry greeted the two men, and in the dimly-lighted apartment they stopped suddenly, and gazed at the person before them.

"A child, by hokey!" cried Felix, with a swift glance from the young occupant of the room to Captain Pygmy. "Is this the passenger, Paul?"

"Yes," answered the captain tartly, and then he went toward the girl still staring at them both and addressed her in anxious tones:

"Have you made up your mind, child? You've had some time for reflection and I am here for your decision."

Instantly the eyes of Lucy the little captive seemed to catch fire, and despite the look of despair on her face, she flushed with indignation.

"I had nothing to decide," said she. "I told you before you went away that you could not have the secret."

"Which means the message sent to some one by your mistress just before she put herself out of the world?"

"That is the way you construe it," replied the girl, abating none of her determination.

"You see what we've got," laughed Captain Pygmy, turning to Felix, who had not taken his black eyes from the girl since their entrance.

"A little headstrong," returned Felix.

"No, not that. I am only contending for my rights," and a single step brought Lucy close to the two men, but her eyes were now fixed on Felix. "In the first place no one has a right to detain me here. I am held because Captain Pygmy wants me to help him through with a plot against somebody and somebody's money. He holds me now because I will not divulge a certain secret which should belong only to me. You know that this is not right, but if you are his friend, and in the game with him, I suppose I appeal to you in vain."

"Of course you do," put in the dwarf before Felix could shape an answer. "Felix and I are old friends, and he is somewhat interested in all that concerns me. So don't waste any breath on him, girl."

The captive of the house fell back and her eyes dropped.

"Did I understand that you are not ready to surrender the secret?" Captain Pygmy asked.

"I will not give it up!"

"Not if the surrender would restore you at once to freedom?"

"Not even then!"

"A stubborn head is one's worst enemy," said the dwarf. "I've offered you all that's fair, child. You reject every overture, and there's nothing left for me to do but to play the hand out."

He took a sudden step toward Lucy, and one of his hands left a coat pocket and shook something in the girl's face.

In another instant both hands swooped down over her head, and before she could resist a rubber strap had been placed over her mouth and she was deprived of the chance of using her voice.

"Now, Felix, we'll take the bird to your cage," remarked Captain Pygmy to his companion, who had regarded this proceeding with some

wonderment. "Because she refuses to surrender the secret here, don't think that she will not change her mind in time. She'll go with us quietly, for," with a significant look at Lucy, "she knows that Captain Pygmy will let nothing—not even life itself—block the game for him now."

It was useless for the young girl to try to loosen herself from the grip that had fastened on her arm, and as it seemed to tighten, she was conducted across the room and into the hall beyond.

A thrilling thought flashed across her mind. Was she going out? and whither?

Once on the street, even in the power of the two men, something might turn up in her favor.

True, she had so far failed to find Javert, but the unusual sight of two men conducting a young girl through the streets of Gotham at that hour of the night ought to be enough to attract the attention of the police.

The rubber gag was not uncomfortable, but it effectually silenced her, and when the front door was opened and she again felt on her cheeks the breath of the night, Lucy found a hand at each wrist and a grip there from which there seemed no escape.

She noticed how deserted the street seemed.

There was no person in sight, and when she was walked off, with a man on either side, she wondered if the whole journey to the unknown goal was to be unwatched.

"In mercy's name, where is Captain Javert?" Lucy mentally exclaimed. "I am surely lost and the secret message, too, if these men keep me much longer. Juliette should not have bound me with an oath to find her detective, but since I am bound, I shall not turn back nor surrender one point to Captain Pygmy and his friend."

It soon seemed to the girl that she was being conducted across the city.

Her escort kept to the dark unfrequented streets and among the shadows there.

Now and then they met a pedestrian who passed without noticing that she was in bonds, but not one statur-like policeman blocked their progress with a suspicious look.

"Surely we are going to the river," thought Lucy at last with a look at the buildings now revealed by the lamps, and in a little while Felix loosened his hold and ran to the edge of the pier.

She saw his dark figure bend over the water till it threatened to fall headlong among the swishing waves.

Captain Pygmy stood off a short distance and held her fast.

All at once Felix sprung up and came back.

"By my soul, the boat is gone!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Gone?"

"Gone!"

The revelation seemed to paralyze Captain Pygmy.

"I warned you to tie it securely!" he growled with a mad look at his comrade.

"I did, but I did not calculate on the work of a knife."

"A knife?"

"The rope has been cut."

"By a boat-thief of course!" ejaculated the dwarf.

"I don't know."

"Hold the girl."

Lucy was transferred to Felix's clutch, and Captain Pygmy ran forward.

He dropped on his knees at the edge of the wharf and leaned far down into the darkness below as Felix had done.

"Cut, by the nine gods!" he hissed examining in the starlight a piece of rope which he fished up from the water. "By Jove! it was severed from above, not by any one who stood in the boat. Can't I see by the severed strands how the strokes were made? The boat was cut adrift for some purpose, and there can have been but one!"

He threw the end of the severed boat-rope toward the water and ran back to Felix.

"Your boat is out yonder, empty and drifting!" he exclaimed, pointing over the river which gave up none of the secrets it held.

"Why empty?" asked Felix.

"Because it was cut loose from above as any fool can see. Somebody don't want us to continue the journey."

"Somebody?"

"Yes."

"Surely I was not followed."

"I don't know. It is spies and—spies! We must get another boat."

"How?"

"By our wits. Go up the pier and see what you can find."

"It will be a useless hunt."

"Felix!" cried Captain Pygmy. "The loss of a boat must not throw us back."

"The man who cut it loose may be watching us now."

The sentence threw hope into the captive's eyes, and made her heart beat faster than it had beaten since quitting the strange house.

"Watching us! I wish he was!" cried Captain Pygmy. "I would give worlds to find the wretch who sent the boat adrift. But go on

your hunt for another. There must be one somewhere on the water."

Felix went off with a growl, and Lucy followed his figure as it leaned here and there over the edge of the wharf.

"I trust his hunt will be unsuccessful," she said to herself. "The person who cut the boat loose must have been a friend, and I am safer here than across the river."

After awhile Felix came back, and the girl read his answer on his face before he spoke.

"There isn't a boat within reach," he reported to Captain Pygmy, whose grip suddenly tightened on Lucy's wrist as he answered:

"Then we must go back!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FLIGHT OF A BIRD.

To go back meant more than to go forward.

Both Captain Pygmy and Felix realized this.

The loss of the boat, and especially the peculiar manner in which the moorings had been cut, told them that a spy was on their trail.

"Back! not to the old cage, but to one that will baffle the shrewdest sleuth in New York," growled the dwarf.

"Let us be off. I am eager. The sooner the better it seems to me."

"What, Felix, are you frightened?"

Felix affected to laugh, but the poor light did not prevent the girl prisoner from seeing that the attempt was a miserable failure.

With another searching look along the wharf, and one over the river dancing in the starlight, the pards, baffled by a knife, resumed their grip on Lucy's wrists, and drew back.

The girl was not unwilling to retrace her steps.

It was better to go back than to be taken forward across the river flowing between the cities full of traps and perils.

The person who had cut the rope and loosened the boat could not be far off, and Lucy felt that he would be her friend.

She was taken up the wharf and for some distance over the same ground she had traveled to the river.

She wondered if the boat-stealer was following, but she did not try to compromise him by looking back.

Had Javert found her instead of she finding him, and was he following with a knowledge of the secret she carried in her bosom?

This thought, which sent a thrill to her finger-tips, was not kept long.

It was not probable that Javert had discovered her. The more she thought of the matter, the more convinced of his continued absence did she become.

Javert had left the trail to which he had bound himself in Juliette's presence. He had told her (Lucy) that he had withdrawn from the hunt, and she had found his office for rent and empty.

No; somebody had cut the boat loose without any expectation of befriending her. She must not expect any help from that direction; it was merely an accident which had operated in her favor—nothing more.

Lucy was guarded with the same jealous care which Captain Pygmy and Felix had shown during the trip to the river.

They saw her every look, and did not let a move of hers escape their ferret eyes.

Poor Lucy! she felt her heart sink to immeasurable depths when she was taken into a street which she had never seen before.

She was not going back to the old house.

"If Tom Ferris could see me it would be a relief," thought the girl. "He would follow me to the end, and then inform the police. But I am going to be denied a discovery by the boy's keen eyes. Still, I shall not give up. No! I promised to find Captain Javert, and my promise is one of the secrets I share with the dead!"

Nearly an hour elapsed before the backward trip came to an end.

The two men turned suddenly into a short by-street, and brought up in front of a shuttered brick dwelling which looked much like a prison.

"The new cage at last!" mentally exclaimed the girl, glad that the journey was about to terminate, even though it offered another prison.

Three minutes later she was beyond the threshold of the new "cage," and when Captain Pygmy's hand left her wrist, she fell back and looked at her captors.

"Make yourself at home here for a spell," said the city Caliban. "The sooner you make up your mind to give me the secret, the sooner will you have the pleasure of trying your wings in the Parks and elsewhere."

He did not wait for her to reply, but turned to Felix, and the twain left the room, locking the heavy and unsympathizing door behind them.

"What do you think she did with the message if it was a written one?" asked Felix, when he and Captain Pygmy reached another room in a distant part of the house.

"There's the puzzle," was the grinning response.

"Did you search her?"

"No, I did not."

"Then you don't know anything for certain."

"I did not like to subject the child to any indignities," said Captain Pygmy.

"Are you chicken-hearted, captain?"

The look which accompanied these words almost made the dwarf grate his teeth.

"It is not that, Felix!" he cried with resentment. "Do you think the hand that became so well known in the golden heart of the Sierras has grown less iron-like in the lapse of time? It is the same hand, but I did not like to resort to extreme measures when I thought a little solitary confinement would fetch the girl around. If we had gotten her across the river to-night, I should have let Hazel search her. That would have been better, eh, Felix?"

"Hazel would have done the work well, captain," answered Felix with a smile. "But, as we can't get across—curses on the head of the boat-stealer!—and as the secret is so important in your eyes, we may have to take Hazel's place."

"And search the girl?"

"Yes."

Captain Pygmy made no reply.

"If I were you I would know something," Felix went on. "If as you say Nora Raymont has a detective in her employ—if Captain Cinnabar and his spies—members of the old Spider League, want the general's millions and your life at the same time, why, the sooner you get hold of the girl's secret the better. What if this cage should not prove as strong as you think? What if the man who sent the boat adrift has followed us from the river—"

"Enough!" broke in Captain Pigmy, jumping down from the table upon which he had seated his misshapen figure. "By heavens! if you get such ideas into my head I'll rush in and tear the girl limb from limb in order to get at the secret. Followed, do you think?"

Felix leaned back in his chair and looked calmly at the excited atom.

"Who cut the boat loose?" he asked.

"There it is again! You are bound to drive me to it," cried Captain Pygmy. "You always had a peculiar way of accomplishing your point. Ay, who did cut the rope? That is the puzzle, sure enough."

"Stand there and do nothing and the user of the knife will answer the question himself before morning," retorted Felix. "You haven't asked me for my opinion, captain. Mebbe you don't want it."

"Yes, I do," and the dwarf leaned toward Felix till his little coal-like eyes seemed to scorch his cheeks. "Have you such a thing as an opinion about your head, Felix?"

"I'm never without one, respected captain."

Captain Pygmy looked at his companion as he drew off a pace and waited for a reply.

"I think one of the enemy cut the rope," the man from beyond the river continued coolly.

"Ah! do you? That is the beginning of your opinion, I presume?"

Felix held up his hand to enjoin silence.

"The enemy, as you know, is Captain Cinnabar and Company."

"Xerxes and Monte?"

"The two tiger hounds of the Californian trail," smiled Felix.

"You are becoming positive, Felix," rejoined the dwarf.

"We were seen to meet at the pier, and the man who saw us cut the boat loose to keep us from carrying out the very plan he balked with his blade. I think I've studied this out step by step, captain. We have been balked by the gang, and Spider Cinnabar holds us in a web unless we break it and cut our way out heroically."

"To-night?"

"To-night!"

"But we are incumbered with the girl," and Captain Pygmy looked anxiously toward that part of the house which held the fair prisoner.

"A quick play and the prize, if she has it, is ours," continued Felix noticing the glance. "If you propose to let a child keep you from success because of any scruples of search you may have, you may count Felix out of the game."

The last sentence was spoken with provoking coolness.

"We must keep our grip on the girl no matter what happens," remarked Captain Pygmy as Felix did not proceed.

"What is she worth after the surrender of the secret message which Juliette gave her before she took her life?"

"She may win this very game for us."

"Alive?"

"Alive."

"Then you need not go to extremes. If she has the paper she carries it in her bosom. Beneath her dress lies the very prize which you want. And the iron hand of Captain Pygmy has held back! Well, my old friend, I know when you did not stop at such obstacles."

There was ridicule in every word of Felix's sentences.

"You are right!" suddenly exclaimed Captain Pygmy. "If the boat was not cut loose by one of three men we have been watched by Nora's new sleuth—the one she employed after Javert left the trail. Will you go with me?"

He walked across the room and looked back at Felix from the door.

"I never hold back, especially when there is a million at stake. I'll hold the girl while you rob her and I'll do it neatly, too."

"At my heels, then!"

Captain Pygmy strode from the room with the gliding figure and triumphant face of Felix at his elbow.

A minute afterward the couple reached the door, and the dwarf placed one ear near the lock.

"It is still in there—and dark!" he added.

"Dark!" echoed Felix. "We left her with a light when we came away."

"So we did; but we'll see in a minute."

A key in Captain Pygmy's hand grated in the lock, and then he pushed the door inward.

"There's a window up somewhere!" was his next exclamation, and then he scraped a match across the wall.

As the flame brightened, it flared above his hand, and then he heard an exclamation from Felix.

"Look! The window yonder is open, and the child and her secret are not here!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

HALTED.

"In fortune's name how did she get away?"

Full three minutes passed before Captain Pygmy recovered breath enough to put this question, which was a poser to Felix, who, with eyes wide open and full of amazement, was staring at the raised window.

"I thought this was a safe cage, captain," said Felix, at last, and there was a deep vein of sarcasm in his voice.

"I thought so, too," was the confession. "She must have had outside help," and then, as he thought of the adventure at the river, and Felix's opinion about the man who had cut the rope, Captain Pygmy bounded across the room, and leaned out of the open window.

He saw nothing but the gloom of the alley upon which the house abutted, and the only sounds he heard were those which came from the street.

After awhile he came back to Felix with the ire of a robbed lion tearing at his heart, and his eyes dancing madly in his head.

"Outside help!" he cried, almost choking down in his wrath.

"Monte or Xerxes?" quietly asked Felix.

"Wait! We'll know more by and by," was the response.

Captain Pygmy walked past his companion, and from the room.

"The girl is gone; curses on the man who cut the boat loose!" he grated, whirling upon Felix in the hall. "She's carried off with her the secret Juliette sent by her to some one. But, never mind. Felix, do you have to go back to-night?"

"I am not forced to go."

"Good. Whose boat was it he cut away?"

"It was mine."

"Could it be identified as against you?"

"No."

"That is good. You see, Felix, the river patrol is liable to pick the boat up somewhere, and we might not like eve ybody to know that Felix Finn, once a resident of Camp Satan, California, crossed the river to New York to-night."

"We're safe on that score, Captain Pygmy. I don't have my name painted on my property. But what's to be the next move?"

Captain Pygmy, who had led Felix back to the little room where he had formerly perched himself upon the table, drew from his bosom several papers which he tossed to his companion.

"There are some documents Juliette lost a few hours before she died," said he, smiling on Felix as he began to open the papers.

"Lost them, eh?"

"Yes, in the usual way," answered Captain Pygmy with a cunning leer.

"Oh, I understand, thanks to that eye of yours."

Felix looked at the documents, which were well covered with writing, until he got half through the last one.

"Why didn't she strike him for more than she seems to have done?" he asked, looking up into Captain Pygmy's face.

"Ah, Felix, what was the use when he was helping her when she needed help," he laughed.

"Yes; but General Raymont, or Colonel Nero, was Juliette's husband, yet he kept Nora in the house as his heiress."

"That is true, but women are strange creatures."

"I know 'em," grinned Felix. "But this paper mentions a child born to the couple after the reunion in New York, and years after he had her banished from Camp Satan where, as Colonel Nero, he was cock of the walk."

"So it does, Felix."

"But where's the child?"

Captain Pygmy shook his head.

"Nora is not that child?"

"No."

"Then I'm stuck."

Felix threw the paper down.

"You are thick-headed to-night, Felix, and I

sha'n't enlighten you. Let us talk about something else."

"No, I want to know about Juliette's child. I see the importance of the information. Do you think she confided to Lucy or some one the secret of the real heiress's whereabouts?"

"Felix, your head is getting clear!" exclaimed Captain Pygmy, ending with a laugh. "You see more than a step before you already."

"Then, by my soul! I wish the cage had held the bird a little longer. The girl had the secret."

"She had," replied Captain Pygmy firmly. "And since your head has no cobwebs you can realize what we have lost."

"By Jove! I see it all!"

Felix Finn sprung up and looked like a man about to spring from the room.

"The trail might be struck if we hasten," he cried with a look at the dwarf.

"The trail down the alley? No, Felix, the man who assisted Lucy, whether Monte, Xerxes or some one else, is not for us to see to-night. The band that loosened your boat has held trumps before; my head on that, boy."

"But we might make an effort."

"To scent him out?"

"Yes."

"We will try, but if we fail now we will succeed later."

Half an hour later the house from which Lucy Lemon had mysteriously escaped was as dark and as silent as it was before Captain Pygmy unlocked the door.

The window which had taken the captain's breath by being raised was down again and the shutters were tightly drawn and the slats closed. There was nothing about the premises to indicate the late presence of the jail-birds and their young prisoner.

As for Felix and the captain, they were in another part of the city some distance from the river and the scene of the loss of the boat.

"That man yonder, captain?" whispered Felix, touching the hand of Pygmy who for several minutes had been looking at a pair of shoulders that had a very familiar shape as they rose above the wall table of a cheap and crowded restaurant on the Bowery.

Captain Pygmy turned his eyes and looked in the direction indicated by Felix.

"By the nine gods! you have found Xerxes!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"I thought so, and I haven't seen the fellow since the day he fought the duel with the big Arizonian in Flat Broke Camp."

"He can't wear a disguise," smiled Captain Pygmy. "I'm glad you've found him, Felix. Now, look at my man."

"Where is he?"

"At the third table along the wall."

"The man alone?"

"That is he."

"I can't recognize any one by the back of his shoulders," said Felix after a look.

"I think I have done so on this occasion."

"Who is he, captain?"

"I would call him Monte."

"But the twin sleuths of the Spider League would be together, wouldn't they?"

"Not if they were at a game that requires secrecy and cool heads. They don't even look at one another, but every now and then Monte watches a man who was here when we came in."

"Which is he?"

"Look at the table just across from us," Felix did so.

He found at the table in question a man apparently forty years of age, a comfortable-looking individual, plainly dressed and quietly enjoying the dishes before him.

"That man is the lamb the fox is after," continued Captain Pygmy, while Felix still looked. "I don't know him, but Monte thinks he does. What do you say, Felix?"

Captain Pygmy's companion left his chair and strolled forward to the cigar case at one end of the room. In doing this he passed along the table occupied by the man so closely watched by Xerxes, Captain Cinnabar's spy. He stole one look downward as he walked by—one hasty but discerning look, but that was enough.

A start thrilled him.

A minute afterward he came back to Captain Pygmy and exhibited a white face when he leaned across the table, his teeth chattering almost too much to let him whisper:

"I thought Captain Javert, the Broadway Independent, was out of the game."

Captain Pygmy's eyes immediately dilated.

"Well, isn't he?" he cried. "To judge from your look, you have just seen the sleuth himself."

"So I have!"

The dwarf returned a laugh.

"Why, the man watched by Monte is no more Jack Javert, if I know anything, than I am Julius Caesar!"

"He is Javert himself! Don't I know the man who handed me over to the law one year ago for a bit o' by-play which would have made me rich if he had not put in his hand?"

The dwarf threw a quick look toward the quiet man across the way.

"Look! he is rising and Monte has dropped

his fork. He knows who the man is, and now Xerxes is going out to play fox or wolf as the case may warrant. They know Javert, and so do I."

Already Javert, so called, was paying his score at the cashier's desk, waited on by a pretty girl with black eyes.

This business operation did not take long, and when he moved toward the door, the two men called Monte and Xerxes were on their feet.

They assumed the utmost indifference toward the supposed detective, but Captain Pygmy, if not Felix, saw beneath the skin.

Captain Cinnabar's shadows were at the heels of their prey when he left the house.

"Come! We have game in view now!" whispered the dwarf. "If we let all three get away without giving us a point, we had better withdraw from the drama. Now or never, Felix."

In his eagerness to see all possible to be seen, Captain Pygmy was the first man to reach the sidewalk.

As he stepped from the restaurant he naturally threw his eyes around in search of his quarry.

"Hello!" said a voice at his elbow.

Captain Pygmy looked up.

"Hello, yourself!" he replied to the speaker, whose figure towered above him like a pine, and then he fell back a step as he fully recognized the party addressed.

It was Xerxes!

"Did I frighten you, captain?" continued Cinnabar's right bower, with a malicious grin. "Come, don't try to play innocent. I am Xerxes, and you are Captain Pygmy, once called Major Atom, but not here. Keep your tracks. If you attempt to leave, I'll sink my fingers to your bone. You ought to know my grip, captain, ho, ho, ho!"

Captain Pygmy was a prisoner!

CHAPTER XXVII.

SHADOW AND SHADOW.

"ONCE more caught!" growled Captain Pygmy under his breath. "Felix has vanished already, and Monte is after the detective."

He again looked up into the face of Xerxes, and saw his eyes still glittering with triumph.

Despite his powers, the dwarf knew that to break from the grip by which he was held was next to the impossible, and he did not make the attempt.

"Don't try the dead game," continued Xerxes, seeing the little captain so quiet. "You've played that trick till it is threadbare, and if you give it to me now you'll come back to life, if you should be so fortunate, in a different place than this."

Meantime, Felix, who had not stopped to see what had become of his companion, was following Monte and the man he had singled out in the restaurant.

He might have been mistaken about the identity of Monte's quarry, but he was almost certain he was not.

He feared and hated Javert to whom he owed a term of unpleasant sojourn behind the bars at a time with which our romance has nothing to do.

It was not to be expected that he would so soon forget the man who had sent him up. He always said that he would recognize Javert no matter how he was disguised, and now he believed that he had proved good the assertion.

Felix resolved to keep Monte and his prey in sight and for some time he thought that Captain Pygmy was close behind. When he took time to look back he found that he was alone on the trail, but he had gone too far, and was too near the game to retrace his steps.

Monte's quarry kept on apparently oblivious of the fact that any one was at his heels.

This is better luck than we expected," thought Captain Cinnabar's spy. "While the captain is making the web strong for Lady Panther or Zubiano we have picked up Nora's new sleuth and I am running him down. Xerxes is competent to take care of Captain Pygmy and his pard so I have this whole trail to myself. Before morning I will report good news to Captain Cinnabar, and then for the deadly closing in!"

The hunted man led Monte out of one street into another.

He did not seem to be in any particular hurry, and Monte had no trouble in keeping sight of him.

Felix, too, was having a good time at his little play; that is, he was congratulating himself on the turn affairs had taken, for he was certain of finding the haunts of the man who had blocked one of his deep games and given him a prison-cell instead of success.

At length the shadowed man made an abrupt turn which brought him almost face to face with the river. For six blocks he kept straight ahead.

Monte increased his gait and got almost within speaking distance of his quarry, and Felix had to walk faster to keep pace with Monte.

All at once the victim dodged into an open hallway and vanished.

It was so sudden that Monte thought that he had been deceived by his own keen eyes.

When he came up and saw the gaping hall he knew what had become of Nora's shadow.

Cinnabar's right bower gazed for several seconds into the darkness on the stairway.

He wondered which particular part of the building had received his man.

He had plunged into a large three-story house which might have a hundred rooms for anything he knew to the contrary, and he longed to know which one had taken him in.

Monte knew the interior arrangement of houses of this description. Since transporting himself from the gold region to the great city, he had made himself acquainted with houses instead of mining-shafts and cactus trails.

"Where's the use of following a man if you don't go to the end?" said Monte to himself in front of the building. "Mr. Powers doesn't dream that any one has been at his heels all this time, and just now he may be engaged in some operation, good for my eyes. By Jove! I'm going up."

Monte slipped into the hallway and leaning against the wall just inside, took a pair of very light rubber soles from his pockets and adjusted them to his feet.

Then he went up the narrow steps, guiding himself by the wall, and when he had reached the top he stopped to map out the rest of the campaign.

"It's kind o' like goin' into a strange mine," muttered Monte. "You don't know what you're goin' to run against nor when. These houses sometimes hold a hundred people, and the one man you want is generally the last one you find."

The Californian's sleuth felt his way down a hall to another which was dimly lighted by a feeble jet that burned with a bluish light.

Springing noiselessly forward he reached up and turned the light out.

"I don't want any shadows where I am," he said under his breath. "I'm not going to take many chances o' bein' handed over to the police as a common house prowler."

When the light was out Monte saw a light through a transom near the end of the corridor.

He was at the door in a second.

"My man for a thousand!" he exclaimed. "But who is he talking to? That's what I want to see."

It cost Monte no effort to raise his hands and clutch the wooden bar across the top of the door.

In another moment he had lifted his body clear of the floor, and his eyes rose above the bar and looked into the room beyond.

It was a small room, plainly furnished and tenanted by two persons.

Monte took in the whole scene at a glance.

He saw the man he had tracked from street to street. He noticed that he had cast aside the beard in which he had taken supper, and that his face was now smooth, with two expressive black eyes above the full cheeks.

"What would Cap'n Cinnabar say if he was hanging here?" exclaimed Monte. "I told him that the man I saw at Nora's had eyes like Javert. Now I've gone another step. The man is Javert—Javert, who is supposed to have been roasted in the web that caught him!"

Monte saw his quarry lean toward his companion, who was a young girl, and then heard him say:

"You haven't been found yet, eh, Lucy?"

"No, thanks to you," was the reply, a smile appearing on the face of the speaker. "I have been thinking ever since you left me here that fortune must have put you on my trail."

"Let us call it fortune," answered the man. "I saw your old friend awhile ago."

The girl started.

"You mean my old enemy, don't you?"

"Perhaps that name does fit him best. At any rate I saw Captain Pygmy."

"He is my enemy, though for awhile I regarded him in the light of a friend."

"He was not alone when I left him."

"Then Felix was with him?"

"Yes, they were two carrion crows together."

"Who is this Felix?"

Mr. Powers laughed.

"My note-book would tell you, Lucy," said he. "Felix is a hawk who lives across the river, but he seeks his prey everywhere. I sent him to the bars once, and I fancy he likes me. But I gave the pair the slip, because I wanted to come back to you."

The girl looked at the detective for several minutes without speaking.

An anxious look was seen to fill her eyes.

"Did you open Juliette's message while you were gone?" she asked.

"I know it all."

Lucy saw the eyes of the speaker fixed upon her, but she said nothing.

"It was a secret indeed," he went on. "Juliette kept it well."

In a moment the girl had left her chair, and Monte, hanging to the door with desperation, saw her grasp the detective's arm and look straight into his eyes.

"Was it about—"

She stopped and removed her hand.

"Was it about who, Lucy?"

Lucy's face lost color, then it came and went again.

"I can't ask you!" she cried. "I have no right to pry into Juliette's secret, yet I would like to know."

She drew off from the smiling detective and dropped her eyes.

"I don't blame you, girl," he said. "You kept the message through thick and thin; you ran the gauntlet with it, and I have it now. A thousand girls would have surrendered it for their freedom, but you have been as true as steel."

Lucy Lemon stood in the middle of the room, wondering if a revelation would follow these words.

Her breath seemed to go from her in gasps; she could hear her heart beat.

"You will let me keep it a while, won't you, child?" continued Mr. Powers, at which the girl's heart seemed to drop.

There was no reply.

The detective stepped forward and touched her gently.

"I'll untangle the skein," he went on. "I am pledged to bring light out of darkness, and I see the first gleams already. I have yet to find the woman who killed General Raymont, and I am now on her trail. I have to discover the new web of the Spider League, and I know which way to look for it. Do not think that since Javert disappeared from the game Mr. Powers has been idle. It is true that I am Nora's detective, but at the same time I am keeping my oath to Juliette."

"I will be silent," exclaimed the girl. "Don't let me know anything I should not know. I am in your hands, Javert. You are my friend, and I trust you. If Juliette's secret brightens or blights my life, I shall not complain. I was happy before she found me; I shall be happy still. But beware of the League and the man outside."

"The man outside, girl?"

"Captain Pygmy. Though an atom, he is shrewd and powerful. He plays desperately for a fortune, and between him and Captain Cinnabar it is tiger and tiger."

"A big tiger and a little one, eh?" laughed the detective.

"Yes, Captain Javert."

Monte loosened his grip and dropped to the floor below at this.

He had seen and heard enough.

Back he went toward the stairs.

"Big news for Captain Cinnabar!" he ejaculated.

He paused at the landing and looked down toward the street.

About six steps below him something dark like a man stood against the wall.

"Is it a shadow?" sent Monte through his teeth. "I shall soon see."

Down he sprung in his rubber soles and as he reached the objective spot the shadow moved and two men came together.

The next instant they grappled and rolled struggling toward the lamplight on the sidewalk!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FATAL SLEEP.

By the merest chance the writhing combatants struck the solid floor of the bottom landing without material injury to themselves.

There for a moment they panted and still locked in deadly embrace glared at one another like rival tigers. Monte saw that he had attacked the man he had left in the Bowery restaurant with Captain Pygmy, and Felix recognized his foe as Cinnabar's sleuth and pard.

"You've tracked me!" said Monte.

"You lie!" answered Felix at the same time forcing Monte's right hand loose.

"You are Captain Pygmy's spy," was the second accusation.

"Another lie!" promptly retorted Felix.

Then he turned his attention to Monte's other hand, and as he broke its hold he pushed his enemy's head against the wall at the risk of breaking his neck, and sprung up like a deer.

Monte followed Felix as soon as possible, but the man from beyond the river again pushed him against the wall and with such force that the concussion stunned him slightly.

"Don't follow me. I'll kill you if you do!" cried Felix, with eyes shooting fire at the same time, and in a second he had cleared the step and was gone.

"Is he off?" growled Monte reaching the sidewalk too late to stop the agile Felix. "What a fool I was. I had him on the step at my mercy for I could have stepped back and thrown a knife half way through him. But let him go. I've discovered enough anyhow, and after such a tussle I'm lucky to get off without any broken bones."

He left Felix to go back after Captain Pygmy or where he listed, and then crept away himself, having marked well the building to which he had tracked the detective and Lucy.

"When Xerxes has placed the dwarf he will turn up. I'll go back and wait for him or report to Captain Cinnabar if I find him in. Won't I shake him out of his boots when I impart the thunderbolt information that Javert didn't perish in the web which accidentally took fire! I told the cap'n that the man I saw at Nora's had the Javert eyes. Don't I know it now? Well, I should think I do!"

Half an hour later Monte let himself into a

house a long distance from the scene of his last exploit.

This time he made sure first that neither Felix nor any one else was on his track. He wanted no repetition of the scene on the dark stairway and the landing below, and it was enough to render him cautious.

Nobody met him in the house and he took a seat in the room where he and Captain Cinnabar had touched glasses to the success of their plot and the utter defeat and worse of Zubiano the Sorceress.

In the first place Monte helped himself from the sideboard.

He found the captain's liquors full of revivifying fire, and settling back for a wait he gave himself over to his thoughts.

He wondered who would come first—Cinnabar or Xerxes and as he expected no one else he was totally unprepared for the person who did come.

Frequent visits to the sideboard in the wall had rendered Monte at peace with nearly the entire world and it was only when a twitch of pain in his neck recalled Felix and the collision with the wall, that he would confess that he still hated somebody.

Monte dozed in the chair under the gas and at the table in the middle of the room.

His dark-brown face thrown back fronted the front window which had a shutter that was closely drawn. His hands hung down over the arms of the chair not very much like the hands of a person on guard.

After awhile the door at his left opened from the hall.

Monte heard nothing. The step that followed would not have broken the slumbers of a cat.

It came toward Captain Cinnabar's spy, and the eyes that watched him had a twinkle if not a glitter of satisfaction.

The intruder was a good-sized man, with a brownish beard and eyes that matched it well in hue. He saw only the man in the chair, and when near the table, he stopped and studied Monte several minutes.

"On guard and in the arms of Bacchus!" muttered the visitor, looking at the bottle and glass that stood side by side on the table. "Captain Cinnabar would smile at this himself if he could drop in just now. But he isn't here to enjoy the scene, and I sha'n't disturb it."

The speaker passed around Monte and opened a door behind him.

"What is more fortunate for me than Captain Cinnabar's choice of this house?" he said to himself. "I know no house in Gotham better. Here for a week I lay watching some people across the street, and when I never thought of crossing swords with the so-called Spider League."

He looked over his shoulder at the man still sleeping in the chair, and then entered the apartment revealed by the door.

In another second he was gone, and the door was closed as before.

An hour passed away. The clocks of New York had struck the hour of midnight, and the streets had long before settled down to quiet and content.

All at once Monte opened his eyes—or rather they had been jarred apart by the closing of a portal somewhere.

"Hang me, if I don't b'lieve I was asleep!" he exclaimed. "When did I come here? It was after I found Javert and had the tussle with the man who nearly twisted my neck off my shoulders. I'd like to know—Hello!"

Monte's greeting was intended for the man who had just stepped into the room.

"Did you hold him, Xerxes?" he cried.

"Ho! do I look like Xerxes?" was the answer. "What sort o' sight have you fished out o' the bottle? Here! you've been asleep, Captain Monte."

By this time the lieutenant of the League saw that he had taken a very different person for Xerxes, and he hastened to apologize, but his tongue was still thick, and his brain a trifle "heavy."

"Well, how did you get along, anyhow?" he asked, "Did you throw the net over her this time, or did she repulse you with more of her infernal magic?"

"Do I look like a beaten dog?" laughed the spy's auditor, who was Captain Cinnabar himself. "I made up my mind, as you know, Monte, to get even with Lady Panther and her black art."

"But did you?" asked Monte, eagerly.

Captain Cinnabar broke out into another laugh.

"Once when we thought the League was doomed to betrayal in California, you recollect that I threw myself forward and single-handed placed us beyond that point," said he.

"I haven't forgotten the circumstance, captain."

"History repeats itself sometimes."

"Yes, yes."

Cinnabar seemed to take infinite pleasure in drawing Monte on step by step, and lifting his eagerness to the highest pitch.

"Now, my friend, do you think you can appreciate some good news a little startling, but splendid: all the same?" he suddenly went on.

"I can appreciate anything."

"Especially the contents of the side-board, eh, Monte? But never mind that. You ought to have some news to swap for mine—"

"By the nine gods, I have!"

"Well, keep it till I'm through with my budget."

"Go on, then."

Captain Cinnabar again looked triumphant.

"I went back to the witch's den," said he.

"Alone?"

"No interruptions!"

The half-drunk Monte ludicrously covered his mouth with one of his broad hands.

"I found the place as quiet as a tomb—no blazing pyramids on the stair, and no fool suffocating in the hall. It was like coming out of a chamber of Tartarus and going into a hall of silence. I took chances—the kind we used to take in the desperate days of the Spider League—and I went into the house like a burglar by the back way, with my knife along my sleeve, and my eyes on the lookout.

"You have never been there, Monte, and—"

"I don't want to go after your experience," broke in the spy.

"You can go now with impunity. Number—Y—street is quite peaceful at this time."

"Then you found Lady Panther at home?"

"She was there. She is there yet."

"And we have nothing between us and Colonel Nero's millions?"

"Nothing that I count a formidable obstacle. Of course there is Captain Pygmy, whom Xerxes will take care of, if he hasn't done so already; then we have Nora and her new sleuth, who has the Javert eyes—"

Monte seemed called back to the past by the name just spoken.

"And he has them yet. By the nine gods, captain, they're still in the same head, and they belong to Javert himself!"

Cinnabar, of California, stared at Monte a moment, and then bent forward.

"You are flighty, man!" he smiled. "No detective rises alive from his own ashes. Javert perished with the web—"

"Javert lives, and is on the trail!" was the response. "I saw Mr. Powers, Nora's new sleuth, cast aside his beard, and stand forth in Lucy Lemon's presence, Jack Javert, the Broadway Independent. There ar' no cobwebs in my brain now, Captain Cinnabar. If we have finished Ximena, or Lady Panther, we must spin a stronger web than one of five for the man who hunts for Nora and the little girl."

Captain Cinnabar fell back.

"Monte, you lie!" cried he.

Lips twitched, but there was no reply.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NOW XERXES LOST HIS EEL.

SOME time elapsed before Captain Cinnabar became calm enough to proceed, and when Monte found his tongue after the furious epithet and accusation, he repeated his declaration in a manner that carried conviction with it.

Cinnabar wanted the particulars, and he got them with a detail that ought to have satisfied the most exacting.

Javert alive!

The thought seemed to burn the Californian's brain, and to send dancing sparks of fire through his blood.

"How did the sleuth get out of the net?" queried Captain Cinnabar.

"That's where I'm puzzled. Of course if he had been there when the web took fire, we would not be discussing his escape now."

"That is evident, Monte. He was there five minutes before the fire started."

"It is very strange—simply inexplicable."

"And we can't get at the secret only through the detective himself," grinned Monte.

"We will get it; give us time," was the quick response. "So Javert has found the girl, Lucy? He is still playing a hand for Nora Raymond, the general's heiress. I shouldn't wonder if he knows the value of the prize he has picked up. Javert is no better than some other sleuths who always keep an eye open to the interests of their pocketbooks. He is apt to work Nora for himself."

"But the young lawyer, Mr. Nixon, to whom she is supposed to be engaged?"

"He isn't actively in the game," said Captain Cinnabar. "The sorceress of New York will trouble us no more. I have attended to that and you may be sure, Monte, that it was well done."

"What became of the girl who stood on the stair and threw the pyramid at you?"

"I didn't see her."

"Won't she direct suspicion when she comes back?"

"I don't fear her. We've finished the mistress, the slave is harmless."

Monte heard the front door of the house open and shut, and while both men waited for the new-comer a shadow fell across the carpet.

It was the shadow of the splendid figure of Xerxes.

"I thought I had caught a snake, but I had an eel!" he cried, bursting into a fit of laughter when he caught sight of his companion.

Monte nearly left his chair.

"Did Captain Pygmy get away?" he cried.

"Hold an eel if you can!" was the response.

Captain Cinnabar broke in while he frowned:

"Why didn't you hold him?" he exclaimed.

"He got off, I say, but that's not the strange part of it."

"Let us have the whole story."

Xerxes catching sight of the bottle on the table, helped himself leisurely before he continued.

"I caught the atom at the restaurant door," he said, with another glance at Monte. "He jumped nearly out of his boots, but I settled down on him and told him that silence and sense meant safety. For a moment I thought I had the Tartar secure, but all at once he grew limp in my grip and some man who saw him shouted that he had fainted or was dead—the fool wasn't sure which."

"The old dead trick," remarked Captain Cinnabar.

"Yes, the same old game," answered Xerxes.

"But it did not work, of course!"

"In a moment I had the usual crowd around me," continued the Californian's right bower. "Captain Pygmy lay like a dead man in my grip, and a dozen loud-mouthed fellows were telling me what to do. I said that I knew just how things were—that the little captain wasn't as dead as he let on to be, but the whole crowd laughed and wondered why I did not send the body to the morgue or somewhere else. 'I'll take care of the man,' said I at last, and lifting Captain Pygmy in my arms, I started through the crowd.

"Hold on, there," suddenly spoke a voice behind me, and when I looked around I had a hand on my shoulder. 'That man isn't dead!' said the policeman. I laughed. 'Is he your friend?' I was asked. 'Yes,' said I. 'Wait! I think we want him,' and the cop, holding to the arm of the supposed corpse, looked Captain Pygmy over very carefully. 'Why, this is the man who was picked up for dead in the house of the Mrs. Jansen who committed suicide. He came to life on the way to the morgue and jumped out of the patrol wagon on the road to the station. We want him, as you see it's very likely to be another case of suspended animation.' I was obliged to knock under to this, especially as I had three cops to face instead of one, by the time the speaker got through, and a minute later my eel was gone! They took Captain Pygmy off, followed by a crowd, and I was laughed at for my pains."

"Didn't you follow?" asked Captain Cinnabar.

"No; there were certain risks in that direction, and I let Captain Pygmy go. If I had succeeded in holding him, he would have come here with me, rather against his will, of course, but he would have come all the same! I think the police will hold him till he comes out of his trance, and then they'll work him for all he is worth. But the captain is no fool, and the cops may find in him the same Tartar I ran across."

"I hope they will, but if they will put the California eel behind bars too small for him to wriggle through, they will confer a favor on Captain Cinnabar."

Monte offered no opinion and no suggestions.

Xerxes's story which had given its narrator some pleasure had not amused him.

"When I catch Captain Pygmy, if I ever do," he growled to himself, "there will be a genuine corpse for the morgue and all the science in New York won't be able to pump life back into it, either!"

"Where's your man?" suddenly asked Xerxes, turning to his late companion.

"He got away."

"Like mine did, eh?"

"No, I didn't surrender him to the police—that's about all the difference."

"No more of this," interposed Captain Cinnabar, seeing that Monte cut his sentences madly. "The web is strong again. Its threads will not be broken, nor even tried."

"You forget the sleuth," observed Monte.

"The man we saw at the restaurant?" asked Xerxes.

"The one I ran down."

"And who was he—Mr. Powers, Nora's shadow?"

"More than that, sir. The man was Javert." In an instant the face of Xerxes grew white. He looked quickly at Cinnabar.

"What think you, Xerxes?" queried the captain.

"Javert, eh? I thought he went out of the game when the old web became ashes," he answered.

"So did I, but Monte will have it that he has seen him."

Monte nodded.

"I followed him to the girl, Lucy—Juliette's waif and protegee. I looked over the transom and crept away to have a tussle with a human tiger-cat on a stair. I know that I have not lied. The man sworn to find General Raymond's assassin and to hunt us down as well, is still on the war-path. He is Javert, the Broadway sleuth, and a man who knows how to make webs as well as some one else. If he is not to be turned on at once, count me out of the play."

"Ho! ho! is this the old Monte of the old League?" laughed Xerxes.

"I am Monte, but by the nine gods, I'm no fool."

"You don't want your share of the general's millions."

"I don't want to exchange my freedom for a little cell with an iron bedstead if for nothing else."

"You had Javert in your grip as I had Captain Pygmy. You looked over the transom you say."

"Yes."

"You were armed?"

"I always am."

"And yet you come hither and say that if the web doesn't catch and dispose of Javert immediately you will quit the game. Why didn't you spin a web in a cloud of smoke when everything was in your favor—"

"When I was hanging to the door, eh?"

"Yes!"

"I might have been caught before I reached the street. I repeat that I'm no fool, Xerxes."

Monte said the last words with such ill grace that Xerxes resolved not to further irritate him with a reply.

"A truce to this," put in Captain Cinnabar. "The sleuth will be attended to and the millions will be divided according to the old agreement. We can go several steps further on the trail before day. Monte will go back to his late quarry—Javert and the girl. Xerxes will return to his prisoner."

"You want to know what has become of Captain Pygmy, I see."

"I do."

"Is the little man that dangerous?"

"He is important enough to be looked after."

"Then, he shall be found. But you, captain?"

Cinnabar smiled.

"I play the gentleman in kids."

"In the night?" asked Xerxes.

"Yes, and in daylight, too. If you have anything to report, come here by ten to-morrow, and if I am not in, write it out in the old cipher and leave it in the side-board."

A short time afterward the room was empty and the lights were out.

For all this a dim gleam came in from the lamp on the street, and fell weirdly upon a door in the wall.

All at once this door opened and a man stepped forth.

He was the person who had entered the room while Monte was waiting for Cinnabar and Xerxes after his adventure on the detective's trail.

"The spy has gone back to the trail, has he?" smiled this man. "Xerxes intends to follow Captain Pygmy the dwarf through his trance, and the king spider of the web is about to turn gentleman! I think I know what it means, Nora is going to have a visitor. Captain Cinnabar is about to play a hand with the claws under the velvet. Fresh from his terrible stroke in the house on Y—street, he intends to throw another card which will put the gang a long ways forward on the road to victory. But what did he do to Zubiano the Sorceress? Did he really break the power of the woman who killed General Raymont? Ah! captain, I want to see the destruction wrought by your merciless web."

Another minute had not joined its vanished fellows when the sleuth of Gotham was on the street again.

He was soon beyond the neighborhood, and if either of the spider trio had followed him he would have been seen to halt some time afterward in front of a house whose very outward appearance, grim and dark in the morning light, told of a mystery—the mystery of death beyond the door.

"This is the scene of the captain's swoop," murmured the detective.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT THE DETECTIVE FOUND.

The sleuth of Gotham had come to the house he was inspecting for the purpose of looking beyond its threshold and upon the secrets it held in its keeping.

If he had the means of entering Captain Cinnabar's place at will, he was not so fortunately situated with Zubiano's house.

The front door did not welcome him by unclosing at his look, and thus shut out he was obliged to make his way to an alley in the rear of the premises and thence to the house through the cramped back yard.

It was a burglar-like mode of gaining his ends but the detective persevered, and a loose sash allowed him to drop to the floor of an unlighted room beyond.

Not a sound disturbed the solitude of the witch's house.

The detective stood statue-like in the gloom for several minutes and listened, then he leaned against a wall and drew his shoes.

He had been in strange houses before, but he had never entered one with the same feelings which now held full possession of him.

Captain Cinnabar's report had prepared him for something startling and terrible.

He knew that the captain of the gold league—

the chief spider of the great web, had preceded him, and that he had struck without mercy and to the bitter death.

To go forward would be to find Lady Panther or Zubiano a mutilated corpse within four walls.

She was the woman whom he had promised to run down for Nora Raymont, bent on vengeance for the general's death. He had found her trail since his miraculous escape from Captain Cinnabar's web, long since in ashes, and when he was nearly ready to straighten out the last tangle of the skein of mystery, the Californian had stepped in with his strong hand.

The city shadow did not remain long on his first halting spot in the dark room.

His hand moving along the wall found a door the knob of which turned easily in his grasp, and he leaned across another step.

If he had heard little Lucy's story of how she had lifted the curtain which hung between her and Juliette dead in her chair, he must have recalled it as he opened the door of the second chamber.

There was no light in this room, but its absence did not check the eager ferret.

He went forward several paces and stopped.

His hand touched a table and when he moved it, it came in contact with a porcelain receptacle for matches.

Instantly the detective took out a match and felt it with a finger.

It was one of the noiseless kind.

In a moment he drew it deliberately across one side of the receiver, and saw the little light burst forth.

Something seemed to tell him that he was on the scene of Captain Cinnabar's swoop.

He held the match in a position that served to feed the flame, and when it was burning freely he pushed it forward and looked.

All at once an exclamation broke from the detective's throat. Nineteen men out of twenty would have fallen back, but he held his ground.

He was face to face with the tenant of the room, and so close as to almost touch her.

A velvet-armed chair of ample dimensions stood by the table.

It contained a woman whose arms half bare were lashed to the sides of the chair.

Her head was thrown back against the crimson backing, and cords of the kind that pinned her arms passed round her neck.

The detective saw that he stood before Lady Panther, and the dreadful stare in her eyes riveted on the ceiling with the deathly pallor that covered the face, told him that Captain Cinnabar had not visited her in vain.

The match flickered and dropped while he looked, and as the horrible picture faded into darkness again, the sleuth struck a second light and turned on the gas.

Now he saw the tableau in all its grim coloring, and again for a second he gazed at it like a man pinioned by a spell.

"Dead, of course!" ejaculated the detective. "The California spider made his web sufficiently strong this time. But the hammer of retribution will break it when the time comes. And the time is almost here."

The city ferret cut the cords that held the woman's head against the chair, but it did not move.

"Dead!" he repeated. "I came too late, for I verily believe that Captain Cinnabar left breath in this body when he went away."

In another second the sound of a latch fell upon the detective's ears.

He started back from Zubiano and turned in time to see the portal open and to stand face to face with a frightened young girl who appeared ready to drop to the floor in a swoon.

"Stand where you are!" cried the sleuth, going forward. "You see what is before you. What do you know about the crime?"

She fell back at the touch of his hand, but she was not permitted to fly.

"It is my mistress—Zubiano!" she gasped, as he drew her forward. "The man came back!"

"What man?"

"Captain Cinnabar."

"Then, he was here before?"

"He was. We repulsed him with the cone."

"What is the cone?"

"Zubiano knew—I do not," was the answer. "I threw it upon him at her bidding, and he tore the door open in his agonies and plunged headlong into the street. It was something terrible to see the work of the cone. But who are you?—the companion of Captain Cinnabar?"

"I am Javert."

The girl fell back and looked at the detective while her eyes filled with wonder and triumph.

"Then, if you are Javert, I am glad you came when you did," said she at last.

"Why, girl?"

"Because my mistress is dead. You are Javert the detective. You are in Nora's employ and consequently Zubiano's enemy. You can take her now, Captain Javert, but she will not see the triumph of the girl whom she hates."

"Nora?"

"Nora."

"When did you go away?" asked the detective.

"It must have been but a short time before Captain Cinnabar came."

"Are you sure he did this?"

Javert pointed toward the woman in the chair as he spoke.

"Of course. Although I did not see the deed, I know whose hand delivered the blow. Zubiano had secrets, besides her magic, which she zealously kept from me; but I know that she was a giantess in the Spider Chief's march to success. I am not familiar with her past career. She made no confidante of me, but her hand was soft to those who were her friends, but, full of nettles for her foes."

Javert's grasp relaxed a degree, and the witch's maid drew back.

Before he fully knew that she had slipped away she was gone, and he was once more alone with the man spider's victim.

Javert went to the door and heard footsteps which soon died away somewhere above his head.

He left the sorceress to herself.

"The girl knows more than she has told," said he. "I want a certain object which Zubiano is known to possess. Mariette said that the woman who visited Raymont that fatal morning wore a serpent-headed ring. Does the maid know where it is?"

The detective found a flight of steps just discernible in the dim light that pervaded the chamber, and in another moment he was half-way up.

At the top of the flight he stopped undecided, but a second later the flashing of a light ahead took him forward.

The door which he reached stood slightly ajar, and he saw the bent figure of the maid in the room beyond.

She seemed intent on the inspection of a small cabinet which stood open before her, and the detective watched her steadily.

"She told me once that if the web ever held her, to give the contents of the private case to the flames without examination. The time has come, and I have but to keep my sacred promise with the dead!"

At this moment the hands of the maid diving into the cabinet brought up a number of packages, the most of which were bound with tape sealed with crimson wax.

"These are no more for the detective downstairs than they were for Captain Cinnabar, the death-spider," she said aloud. "Zubiano was more than the person she professed to be. She killed to get even and practiced magic to get money. Her secrets, I say, were not mine, and I'm willing to keep them by fire from the detectives who want to make fame and fortune."

The girl drew a match sharply across the top of the open lid of the cabinet, and as the flame leaped up she held it down toward a lot of paper which was prompt to catch the blaze.

The following moment, though, she sprung up with a cry, for a hand falling over her shoulder had clutched the paper and smothered the incipient flame!

It was the hand of Javert!

"No! not this way, girl," said he as he caught her wrist and saw her face change from white to scarlet. "I am too near the end of the hunt to be baffled by a match!"

The maid fell back the length of his arm, and then by a violent jerk tore loose and went flying down the steps like a frightened specter.

Javert followed in a twinkling, to find the door of the dead room shut and bolted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LINK FOUND.

JAVERT had to smile when he found himself thus turned on and frustrated by the young girl.

If he could have looked beyond the door he would have seen her standing erect in the middle of the room with her eyes full of defiance, and with her blood at the boiling point though her face was white.

He believed that he was strong enough to force the door by throwing himself against it, but what would he gain by such a procedure?

Nothing.

He adopted the more pacific course and went back up-stairs to the room where he had surprised the maid over the contents of the cabinet.

They lay where she had left them in her flight and the partially-burned paper over the heap showed him how near they had come to destruction.

In a moment he was going through the various packages. Some were closely sealed and others quite open, as if they were not of much importance.

The detective became absorbed in his search before he was aware of being so.

Suddenly a puff of smoke came in at the door which he had left ajar.

It seemed to fill the space about him with a vapor that instantly choked up his lungs.

In an instant Javert was on his feet, and as he turned, a hissing, sputtering object fell against his bosom and broke into a hundred pieces!

"You shall experience Captain Cinnabar's agony, Detective Javert!" exclaimed a voice

which he recognized. "That is the magic cone. Wherever it touches flesh it marks for life, and Zubiano brands you in her death trance!"

Already the detective was feeling the nauseating influence of the abominable cone.

The adbering particles had burned their way through his clothing, and were sinking into his flesh like particles of red-hot iron.

He wanted to throw himself beneath the waves of a rushing river.

In mortal agony as he was, and turned to the bone as he seemed to be, Javert rushed back to the open cabinet and, despite the smoke which blinded him, gathered up the packages there and sprung from the room.

It was by the merest chance that he went down the steps without falling headlong.

The door of Zubiano's chamber was still closed, and he had no doubt that it was locked.

Clutching the prizes he had obtained, he kept on to the front door and jerked it open.

The draught of cold air that struck him was exhilarating.

His lungs filled with the night atmosphere expelled the noxious vapor, and the door had hardly closed behind him ere he wished himself back in the house to contend with the maid and her mistress's magic.

But Javert did not carry out his first thought and go back.

"By Jove!" cried he, "the girl knows how to use some of Zubiano's black-art appliances, if she does not share her secrets. I will go back to my lodgings and see what the visit netted me."

With a last look at the house, the New York detective went up the street and vanished.

A few minutes afterward he let himself into a small room, in a large building full of similar apartments, and placed his spoil on a table.

"Now, my maid of fire, we will see what the trip yielded," muttered Javert, with a smile. "The serpent-headed ring may not be here, but the net result may be something just as conclusive."

In the small hours of that night of adventure and peril, the city sleuth set to work to untangle still further the skein which had been placed in his hands by Nora Raymont.

He had found the murderer, but dead in her den of magic—ruthlessly killed by the merciless hand of Captain Cinnabar, the chief spider of the web.

He first made sure that no keen eyes had been raised above the transom, that Monte was not in the narrow hall, watching as before, when he had seen him with Lucy, whom he had rescued from the hands of Captain Pigmy and the wily Felix.

Javert broke the seal of one of the packages, and opened it.

He found a number of letters which he did not understand, and they were laid aside.

Packet after packet he took up and opened.

At last but one remained.

"If it is not here I am beaten," said he.

He removed the outer covering of the last package with eager fingers.

A small box like a jewel case fell out on the table.

Javert picked it up, and pressed a metallic button beneath the lid.

At once the box flew open, and in the light above the table, something shone like two diamonds.

"The proof!—the proof!" exclaimed Javert.

Then his quick fingers darted into the velvet-covered little cabinet, and drew forth a ring, whose crest was a weird-looking serpent's head, with two eyes that emitted flashes of light.

For several seconds the detective held the ring between thumb and finger, and studied it with triumph. It was the same bauble which Mariette had seen on the hand of the veiled woman who called at the Raymont mansion on a certain day, and after whose departure the general, or Colonel Nero, was found dead, suffocated by a compound which the men of science could not name.

He had not worked in vain, but he could not hand the slayer over to Nora and the law for punishment.

Captain Cinnabar had come between, and death reigned where he had struck.

Javert put up the ring and closed the lid of the cabinet. He drew the papers together and tied them in one heap.

As he finished his task he heard several light taps at the door.

In a moment he was there.

"Do I disturb you, Captain Javert?" asked a voice as the door was opened. "Another day has come and I am anxious to know what you have found."

The face of Lucy Lemon was full of eagerness as Javert admitted her and her eyes instantly rested on the burden of the table.

"You were not unsuccessful," she said looking again at the Broadway sleuth.

"Not altogether so," was the reply.

"Did you find Juliette's ring?"

Without a reply Javert walked over to the table and took the velvet cabinet from the package there.

"That is it!" exclaimed the girl when she saw the ring lying in its nest of velvet. "That is

Juliette's box, too. Ah, this was the missing link, Captain Javert."

"It was the main one, Lucy."

"Did its possessor surrender it without a battle?"

"I found her dead."

The girl recoiled with an exclamation of surprise on her tongue.

"Do you mean the woman whom you have called Zubiano the Sorceress?" she cried.

"Yes."

"Dead? Did she follow Juliette with the poison vial?"

"No."

"Then, the web closed in on her, eh, Captain Javert?"

"It did."

Lucy stood for a moment without speaking, but all the time she turned the serpent-headed ring over and over in her hand.

She was an object of watchful interest to Javert who could study her now in the soft daylight that stole into the room by the window.

"Here it is," said she at length handing back the ring. "It cost a life, and it has become an object of horror to me. I have seen enough of the ring, Javert. You can give it to Nora who waits for the proof of crime. If it were my property and I were Nora Raymont, I would throw the bauble into the river!"

"Nora will not," replied the detective.

"But she will wish that you had brought her the murderer and not the ring?"

"That is true, but I could not incumber myself with the dead."

The young girl went to the window, and with one hand pushed back the plain curtain.

"I wonder if she would tell me now?" murmured the detective. "She does not seem to know how important she is in this strange game with its webs and spiders. I will ask her."

He let Lucy remain a moment longer at the window strangely absorbed in the scenes below, then he spoke her name.

"What is it, Javert?" she asked, dropping the curtain and turning quickly upon him.

"Come here, girl."

She instantly obeyed, and as she halted in front of him, she held out both hands as though she knew that he wanted to take them.

"Lucy, child, did you ever dream about your mother?" he asked, catching her eyes full of wonder and fixed on him.

"My mother! A thousand times, Javert?" she replied.

"What was she like in your dreams, girl?"

"She was always the same person—tall and handsome."

"Something like Juliette?"

The girl started.

"Why do you bring Juliette in for comparison? Yes, she was like Juliette, only the creature of my dreams looked younger."

"Then you know nothing about the real mother?"

"No. The woman from whom Juliette took me, told me that she was not my mother."

Javert looked at the girl again, and did not speak for awhile.

"Why don't you go on, Captain Javert? I am willing to tell you all I know."

"Which is not much, I'm afraid," returned the sleuth. "You have not discovered the life-secret Captain Pygmy, the dwarf, was going to share with you for playing spy on Juliette?"

"I have not if he had a secret, the little rogue."

"He has one, Lucy."

"About me?"

"Yes."

"Then, why don't you run it down, Captain Javert?" she asked with a smile.

"What if I should tell you that I had?"

She came closer, a thrill of excitement shaking her hands in his grasp.

"Then you have been on more than one trail all the time!" she cried. "I more than half suspected you some time ago. Was the little giant willing to give up his secret, or was he dead when you found it, like Zubiano the Sorceress?"

"The captain has got into a bit of trouble, but his wits may get him out. Lucy, I am going to introduce you to a certain young lady."

"A fine one, Captain Javert?" naively asked the girl.

"Yes, a rich one, too—one of the heiresses of Gotham."

"When are you going to do this?"

"To-morrow. I shall not be ready before that time."

"Do you mind to tell me this lady's name?"

The detective met this question with a smile.

"We call her Nora Raymont," said he.

Lucy withdrew her hands; her look became a stare.

"Why should she see me, Captain Javert?" she asked.

"Wait and see."

The house had lately become one of the famous ones of the great city, and it had been pointed out to strangers as the dwelling of the millionaire, who, dying suddenly under suspicious circumstances, had left but one heir—a beautiful young woman who had vowed to spend every dollar of her great wealth in clearing up the mystery of her father's death.

The hour was ten in the morning, and a clock in an adjoining room had just struck the hour in silvery tones when the services of Mariette, the maid, were demanded at the front door.

Nora waited quietly for the girl's report.

"It is he, Miss Nora," said Mariette, appearing at the door, and giving her mistress a peculiar look which was fringed with a smile.

"Admit him, Mariette."

The next minute the heavier step of a man was heard, and Nora, with the same quiet demeanor, saw a tall, well-built person, neatly attired, even to kids, enter the room.

Dress as he would, Captain Cinnabar would be the California spider in spite of himself.

He came forward with the oily greeting which he had learned before he left the scene of his deadly webs woven in conjunction with Colonel Nero, the king of the gold banditti of the Sierras.

Nora had not seen him since his call shortly after the tragedy of the mansion, when she told him to his face that she intended to find the true claimants to Raymont's wealth, even though it beggared her and exposed the past life of her father.

She had been prepared for the present call by Javert, who, concealed in the closet of Captain Cinnabar's house, had heard the last consultation between the spider and his spies.

"I have not bothered you for some time, Miss Nora," said Cinnabar, getting "down to business" as he mentally expressed it after a few formalities. "You must have discovered by this time that your task is quite He culean."

"Do you think so, Captain Cinnabar?" smiled the heiress. "Why, I have barely started in the matter."

The rascal frowned.

"Your advisers cannot know the magnitude of the task!" he exclaimed. "I assure you that the heirs of the Don Pedro Mine cannot be found at this late day."

"What would a personal trip to the ground itself result in?"

"What you surely don't expect to play a hand of that sort!" cried the Californian.

"I have not said so. I merely asked."

"Neither you nor your agent would find anything. The Don Pedro Mine failed long ago and the woman who claimed to own it disappeared as suddenly as she came forward. She left no children."

"Do you know this to be true, Captain Cinnabar?"

He leaned forward with a cunning smile on his lips.

"You know who General Raymont was," said he with a wave of his hand. "Therefore, I need conceal nothing. The pretended owner of the Don Pedro claim disappeared by his orders, and I, as the immediate captain of the Spider League, and having in my charge the deadly web, executed those orders. You need not proceed another step toward the heirs of the Don Pedro, because they do not exist."

Nora received these words with an expression which led Captain Cinnabar to believe that they had made a favorable impression.

"I have now a proposition to make," he went on. "You are anxious to find the supposed murderer of General Raymont."

"It is one of the tasks on which I have set my life," answered Nora.

"So I have observed. Well, you have not yet found her?"

"Thus far the hunt has not resulted in the success desired."

"I thought as much because I had not heard of any arrests. Now, Miss Nora, coming back to my words of awhile ago, I wish to repeat that I have a proposition to submit."

"Go on, Captain Cinnabar."

"If you will let me name my reward, I will agree to deliver into your hands the wearer of the serpent-headed ring."

Raymont's heiress started as she looked at the man who coolly spoke in this strain.

"I would want no failure," said she.

"There will be none. I fancy that I am quite as good on the trail as these city shadows whom the people employ nowadays. Besides I'm no novice in tracking people. What is your answer, Miss Nora?"

"It comes without warning, captain," replied the girl. "I confess that I have had a detective in my employ, and—"

"In bargaining with me you break your agreement with him, eh?" broke in Cinnabar.

"To a certain extent I would."

"But you gain your ends; that is much!" exclaimed the western spider. "He is liable to follow the trail long after it has become cold. I can throw the murderer at once into your hands. You may fail at last if you let this opportunity slip. Promise that I shall have the naming of my reward, and the triumph is yours."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TIGER IN KIDS.

NORA RAYMONT was alone in the reception-room of her New York home.

Nora was silent for a moment.

"It is a strange proposition," said she.

"You reject it, then?"

"I have not said so."

In a moment Captain Cinnabar had left his seat, and a stride—which seemed a spring—took him to the young girl's side.

"You will never find the slayer if you reject my proposition!" cried the spider. "The whole plan of success will vanish in an instant, and in its place will appear something more bitter than failure. Do not think that the man who was powerful among the Sierras is weak in New York. Colonel Nero had some secrets which he did not commit to his papers—one in particular which he would not have whispered to you for the world."

"Do you know it?" asked the girl, her lips, ashen in hue, meeting firmly behind the last word.

"Yes; I hold it as my own," was the response. "You may be in a position ere long to regret your refusal to accept Captain Cinnabar's proposition. Why, you have not given me time to hint at the reward I would name."

"No; I did not think you would broach it without my acceptance of your offer."

The Californian gave Nora a smile.

"We will let the secret pass for the present," he went on. "I can lead you to success or throw you back upon the rocks of failure. Without my assistance all the human ferrets of Gotham cannot find the woman you want. I am the successful trail-hound on this trail. Captain Cinnabar has found the prize of the chase, and the secret belongs to him alone! He does not have to hold his proposition back because you have not asked for it. There is but one path to the vengeance you want, Miss Nora, and that is as the wife of Cinnabar of California."

It was evident that Nora Raymont expected a startling climax, but not one of this sort.

She was on her feet almost before the words had left his tongue, and stepping back a short distance, she stood before him with her face flushed and her hands clinched.

Eye met eye in silence for several moments.

"So I am to sell my honor for the secret of a crime, am I?" exclaimed Nora.

"Call it what you please," retorted Captain Cinnabar, his bronze face relaxing none of its Satanic coolness.

"I have no liberty to barter in that manner."

"Then you don't want to go to the end of the trail."

"I do and I shall!"

"Without my aid?"

"Yes, if that aid depends solely on the acceptance of your proposition."

"It depends on nothing else," replied Captain Cinnabar.

"Then the base proposition fails."

To Nora's surprise, the man laughed outright.

"Base, eh?" he cried, emphasizing one of her own expressions. "The heiress of Colonel Nero, with much of his infamous career known to her, characterizes a fair proposition from Captain Cinnabar as base! Why, girl, you don't know what is base when you talk thus. I could stand where I am and disclose a secret which would drive you with a cry from this room. Don't play the stubborn head when you have all to lose in this game involving human life. You want the blood of the woman who left General Raymont dead on the floor of his library, suffocated by strange gases. You have devoted your life to the finding of this woman and to another purpose. You have lost flesh and color in the anxiety attendant on the hunt. Your sleuths have found nothing; they are not worth the paper they write their reports on. Now, when the only door to success is opened to you, you shrink back and reject the prize. I say again that only as Cinnabar's wife can you reach the goal and avert ruin from the house and fortunes of General Raymont!"

"You use the language of one who has not the goods he offers for sale," exclaimed Nora, looking the stalwart fellow squarely in the face.

"Don't push Captain Cinnabar too far!" was the quick retort.

"You throw a subtle threat into your sentence," laughed Nora.

"I can afford to threaten. Captain Cinnabar of the Sierra League is not powerless in Gotham."

"Show your hand, then!" cried the girl, falling back and halting at the door, the knob of which her fingers touched. "Your infamous proposition is rejected once and forever, Spider of California and New York! Look to the web you have spun for General Raymont's gold. It may break in your sight and dissolve like dew before the sun. Mariette will show you out."

Nora opened the door with a last look at the tiger-browed man in the middle of the room.

"One word!" he hissed, as his hand went up and covered her. "I'll make you lower than the low for this defiance! By the eternal gods! I'll fetch your mother here and make you wish in her presence that you had never been born! You are no more Raymont's child than I am. I lower my self—tough as I am—when I ask you

to become my wife. And I'll parade your lineage before the whole city, and—"

He suddenly stopped, for Nora was lying in a dead faint at the foot of the door!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STILL SHOWING HIS TEETH.

SHE will know when she recovers that I am not to be fooled with!" exclaimed Captain Cinnabar with a sinister look at Nora as he turned away.

Nobody came forward to bar his passage from the room and with the tread of a victor he walked out, leaving Nora still unconscious where she had fallen.

Out in the sunlight of the streets the golden Spider of the Sierras readjusted his kids and increased his gait to a rapid walk.

He had not gone the length of the first block when Mariette, Nora's maid, entered the room which had witnessed the interview and found her mistress still in the swoon.

Nora was taken to her own apartments where she was brought back to life by the faithful girl, but when questioned about the cause of the dead faint she sealed her lips and made no reply.

"In Heaven's name, did the monster tell the truth?" exclaimed Nora when she found herself alone. "I am not General Raymont's daughter! I would disown the mother he can bring hither! What shall I do to break the villain's power? Javert must strike. It shall be war to the knife—I see no other way, for nothing in the world could induce me to become Captain Cinnabar's wife."

The captain by this time had progressed some distance and had entered a building and passed to a room in the rear.

This was a small room with two round tables and several chairs, and when he had ordered refreshment for the inner man he picked up one of the papers that littered the little place.

He ran his eye rapidly up one column and down another in search of a particular item.

"There ought to be a mention of it somewhere," muttered he. "This is the paper that gathers in such items and—Ah! here it is!"

Cinnabar's eyes snapped with delight and in a moment he was devouring the paragraph which had rewarded his search.

It was brief and as follows:

"THE RIGHT MAN!"

"The little man taken as dead from the arms of the stranger in front of the Eureka Restaurant, No.—Bowery, by Sergeant Pepper, turns out to be the person wanted by the police for suspected house-breaking. He possesses the marvelous power of playing death at will, and on the occasion of his former arrest he came suddenly out of one of his bairns and escaped by leaping from the patrol wagon. It is thought that he can throw some light on the singular suicide of Mrs. Jansen, though up to this time he has not volunteered the slightest information concerning himself. It has been discovered, however, that he is sometimes called Captain Pygmy, and as the police have a firm grip on him this time, he will be held indefinitely on suspicion, and is quite likely to practice his mortuary trick for the amusement of a lot of prison officials."

"Safe yet!" laughed Captain Cinnabar, at the end of the paragraph, and just as his order came in. "Xerxes need not look further after his late charge, and I can turn him upon Javert, the girl's sleuth. Of course they will hold Captain Pygmy; they'll do that dead or alive. If he goes off into his death-trance again he may find himself on the slab of the morgue, with a stream of cold water pouring over him, and a lot of police looking on. No, my dear captain, you don't want to play fakir just now," and Cinnabar turned to his wine, for he was alone again.

He had scarcely touched his lips with the rim of the glass when he heard the door move, and as it opened, a loud voice beyond sung out:

"Hold on there! That room is occupied!"

But the door opened wider, and as the Californian looked a man came in, and found him at once.

Captain Cinnabar noticed that his visitor shut the door behind him. He came forward, and spoke in a clear voice:

"Good-morning. You are quite alone."

"I am, sir," answered the captain, whose eyes had suddenly got a fierce look, as if he had recognized in the man before him a person whom he did not want to meet.

A faint smile broke the contour of the stranger's lips, and as he dropped into the chair opposite the Californian, he spoke again.

"I need not introduce myself, for it is evident that you know me."

"I ought to," replied Cinnabar coolly. "You are Javert, the detective."

The smile broadened on the listener's face.

"You may have wondered within the last five seconds how I escaped from the web of your own spinning," he went on.

"You need not tell me," answered Cinnabar, with a gesture. "I see that you are here, and that is enough. I knew before this that Satan helped you out of the trap, and we need not discuss that matter here."

"Just as you like," came across the table. "I am pleased to defer to you, Captain Cinnabar. Are you congratulating yourself on the success of the last play?"

Javert glanced at the glass standing empty at the captain's hand.

"My last play?" echoed the spider.

"Yes; the one you made in Zubiano's house."

The Californian started slightly.

Evidently it was not the reply he had expected. Javert had taken him back to Zubiano when he had looked for a reference to his play at Nora's home.

"Do you think I have been to Zubiano?" he asked.

"You struck like a madman there."

"Then," said Captain Cinnabar, leaning across the table, "then, you must have been to the house in person."

"I know who inhabits the silent place."

"Is she still in her chair?"

"I left her there."

The man from the Sierras pushed back his chair and stood erect. As he executed the movement, he threw a hot glance at the detective, who, without rising, looked calmly up into his face.

For a moment Captain Cinnabar seemed on the point of throwing his whole weight upon the man before him, but he suddenly stepped back.

"You have found the trail—in your mind," said he, grinning maliciously to the baleful twinkling of his dark eyes. "You come to me and talk of a dead woman in a chair, just as if I placed her there. Well, what if I did, Captain Javert? Are you willing to blast the life of your beautiful employer by pushing me to the wall?"

There was the deepest malignity in the tones of the man who dropped these sentences.

"You want to let a gulf stretch between us if you have any respect for your client," he continued. "This is a game in which the hand of Captain Cinnabar can give to the young lady the tortures of a living death. I caught you in my web because I found you playing, spy at my window. I don't want to know how you got away. I confess that I thought you perished in the web which was afterward destroyed by fire. But you are before me in the flesh, and that is enough. You are playing trail-dog on me, for the money which a certain young lady is willing to cast at your feet in her search for vengeance. Don't follow the wolf too far nor too close, Captain Javert. He has turned on his foes before; he is liable to turn again."

"You show your teeth whenever you take a notion. We know this," said the young sleuth.

"Of course I do."

"You have cleared the way to General Raymont's wealth by the play in the house of the sorceress. The woman followed by Xerxes in the land of gold did not perish at his hand."

"She did not."

"But she did not escape you, Captain Cinnabar."

"That will do!" cried the Californian. "I have business elsewhere. You may go back to your employer, Ferret Javert. You think you have reached the end of the trail. Because you have found Zubiano the witch you may flatter yourself that you have carried out Nora's commands. She will tell you that I have just quitted her presence. With flashing eyes and heaving bosom she may retail our interview and I doubt not that the narrative will possess some interest for you. What is her lawyer lover's name?—Noel Nixon, eh? Well, when he hears that Captain Cinnabar can drop a bomb of a certain kind at Nora's feet, I guess he will withdraw from the net of Cupid. Hal ha! ha! they think I came from the Sierras unarmed. I have weapons which no eye can find and no hand wrest from me. I know you city sleuths, and I guess you are one of the best, Captain Javert. But good as you are—keen as your life experience has made you—you fail when you cross arms with the man from the Sierras! Follow me or sit there and lay a snare for the wolf of California. I care not which you do. Only keep out of my way, and when you have heard Nora's story advise her to keep back by every means in her power the publishing of the secret I possess!"

Captain Cinnabar touched the door as he concluded.

This man had the audacity of the devil in his nature.

He gave Javert a parting look, and then opened the door.

"Captain Cinnabar, I don't know what you told Nora Raymont," said the detective from his chair. "She may tell me and she may not. I have become acquainted with the threads of the web you have spun for the general's millions. I know the faces and the trails of the two spies who came from California to serve you in Gotham. One of the papers on this table tells that the sneaking career of one of your old acquaintances has ended. Captain Pygmy is in the grip of the police, but you will not weep at this, I know. You and the dwarf are not on good terms. I should think not! You know no secret that can blight Nora's life. She may be beggared by circumstances, but she will be happier than she is to-day. You have tried to clear your way to the stakes of the game by murder. The woman in the chair will strike back, cap-

tain. You will find Javert on the trail to the end. You will see the web destroyed by the avenger, and others will see the spider dead among the ruins."

For a moment Captain Cinnabar seemed on the eve of clearing the space between him and the detective by a desperate bound, but, laughing, "I'm a whole den of tigers compressed into one—ha, ha!" he wrenched open the door and walked out.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EMPTY HOUSE.

"THEY are not here, and neither has left a report," growled the desperate captain, when he had looked into the side-board that graced the wall of his lodgings half an hour after his interview with the detective in the little room of the wine-shop.

It was long past ten o'clock, and Xerxes and Monte had not reported in any shape.

Captain Cinnabar's face still wore the sinister smile with which he had parted from Javert, and when he thought of his last adventures he burst into a loud laugh.

"Xerxes will find the newspaper paragraph to be true," said he, suddenly. "Captain Pygmy has fooled the police for the last time. He can't play his dead game successfully any more, and we might consider him out of the way. I did hit the girl, Nora, with a thunderbolt, didn't I? And my last shot at the ferret staggered him as well. They find me without kids now, and the man who came from the Sierras to win a million or two in New York is not to be beaten with his hand almost on the pile. Captain Javert knows about my swoop on Zubiano. Will he arrest me for it? No! He has no proof. I went there alone. I came away in the same manner, and I left the speechless dead behind! He won't attempt to trip me for that ten strike. I think I know Javert's policy. I have the last play. I can lift my finger and throw two human bounds straight at his throat!"

Meantime Xerxes was on a trail which promised some important developments in another direction.

It did not take him long to discover that Captain Pygmy the dwarf was held by the police, and a little reconnaissance about the station-house told him that the authorities were anxious to learn all they could about their prisoner.

Xerxes conceived the brilliant idea of fastening the grip of the law on the captain who since his arrest had said nothing beyond a vehement denial that he was the man wanted by the police.

In order to do this effectually Captain Cinnabar's right bower by the application of a razor and the purchase of a false beard and some second-hand garments transformed himself into an entirely different looking person, and thus arrayed dropped around to the station on his mission.

He was listened to attentively when he said that he had called for the purpose of identifying a certain man under arrest. He believed he could put beyond cavil the personality of the prisoner called Captain Pygmy, and he was anxious to help justice in any way in his power.

The result of the interview was that the dwarf was sent for, and the turnkey of the station soon brought him into the office.

The dwarfish plotter looked searchingly at the man who awaited him there, and Xerxes in return eyed him from head to foot.

"He is the very man I thought he was," said he with a glance at the lieutenant in charge.

Captain Pygmy seemed to start at the sound of the voice.

"Whom do you call him?" asked the officer.

"Oh, he's had half a dozen names in his time," was the response. "What is he here for?"

"He was found in a house where he was not wanted, and when we had him he played a dead trick on us and got away."

"His old game," laughed Xerxes.

"You know that he has played it before, eh?"

"A hundred times, perhaps."

"In New York?"

"No; this is new ground for him, but it does not take him long to get used to fresh territory."

During this conversation Captain Pygmy's eyes were riveted on Xerxes, and his dwarfish body was thrust forward in his eagerness for as close an inspection as possible.

"What do you say to this?" queried the lieutenant of police, turning abruptly upon Captain Pygmy. "This gentleman says he knows you and many of your tricks. How is it?"

"Who is the gentleman?" asked the dwarf.

"My name is Vidal," said Xerxes.

Captain Pygmy showed his teeth beneath his snapping eyes.

"Mr. Vidal, I presume?" he laughed. "Mr. Vidal, and not Xerxes of California—not the man who used to follow people with a hidden knife and a coiled lasso! No, you have covered your claws with velvet, but one who knows where they are can see them all the same! Ho! ho! you're a nice man to come here to fasten the grip of the police on me! There are more than a dozen nooses waiting for your neck in the West, and I'm nearly willing to bet my head, precious as it is to me, that one will tighten on

you in New York some of these days. Mr. Vidal, and not Xerxes, the mountain thug! Ho! ho! ho! I shall split my sides!" and Captain Pygmy laughed till he grew red as a lobster in the face.

Xerxes never moved a muscle, but looked from the dwarf to the officer with a smile of derision.

"I have no advice to offer," said he. "Hearing of your prisoner, I thought I would drop in to see if he was the person I took him to be. I find him the same party. You are to be congratulated on your luck in picking him up. When I am wanted—if I should be—for the purpose of legal identification, send for Henry Vidal, No. 600 M—street."

The police lieutenant made a memorandum of the address.

"He'll be there if he isn't playing the role of Xerxes for Captain Cinnabar!" exclaimed the dwarf, covering Xerxes with his finger. "This is a most audacious play, old fellow, but there's a good deal at stake—a million or two, eh, my Sierra bloodhound?"

Cinnabar's man made no reply, but turned his back on Captain Pygmy who clinched his hands and gave him looks of rage.

He glared at Xerxes till his attendant took him by the arm to lead him back to his cell, and even then he threw a look over his shoulder at the figure of his foe.

"Wait!" he hissed through his teeth. "You think you've fastened the screws on me, Captain Xerxes, but we shall see! It is a long lane that does not turn at all, and a good sky that never knows a storm. I'm little and I'm in the web now, but have a little patience—you and your chief."

Xerxes felt that he had drawn the cords of the law tighter than ever about the dwarf, and that without compromising himself at all in the eyes of the police.

Of course the authorities would not believe the statements of a criminal as against those of Henry Vidal a reputable citizen of Gotham. He was safe on that score, and he believed that he had dealt Captain Pygmy a staggering blow.

"Now, if Monte has done as well as I have, the day will not have been lost," said he to himself. "Monte was to look after Javert and the girl besides keeping an eye open for the man he had the struggle with on the stair. He won't be apt to find his enemy, but he will see the girl and perhaps the detective. What have I on hand now? Nothing!"

Xerxes stopped suddenly at his own answer.

"Why not look after Captain Cinnabar's work at Zubiano's house?" he suddenly went on. "I presume it is locked, but doors have yielded to me before. The captain wouldn't tell just what he did, and I would like to know."

Xerxes had to turn at the next corner, and a few minutes afterward he passed the house where Cinnabar dealt his blow.

Its shutters were drawn and it had a gloomy look.

While he eyed the premises a gig drove up in front of it and a little man with a buiness air got out.

"Ho! what does this mean?" mentally ejaculated Xerxes.

The man walked up the steps and took a piece of stiff paper and a small hammer from his pocket.

Then he unfolded the paper and placed it against the door, when Xerxes, to his astonishment, read the words "For Rent" thereon.

"That house empty?" he cried. "I can't be mistaken. This is Y—street, and that is the number as I got it from the captain. If he finished the witch of New York, and if he left her in that house dead, why hasn't the sensation got out? I can't believe my eyes, yet there it is—"For Rent."

By this time the man had finished tacking the paper on the door, and as he turned to come down the steps, he happened to catch the watcher's eye.

"You don't want a house, hey?" he said.

A brilliant idea flashed through Xerxes's brain.

"That's just what I'm looking for," he replied. "Are you the owner?"

"No, sir—agent. Do you want to look at the property? It was vacated this morning, and rather unexpectedly, which is nothing against the property, sir. I've got just ten minutes of spare time on my hands. We'll go in. No trouble to show premises, I assure you."

The property agent unlocked the house, and Xerxes walked in.

He found the place well but not expensively furnished. His guide opened the shutters and showed him the various rooms.

There was not a sign of Captain Cinnabar's swoop anywhere, nothing disarranged, and no blood on the floor.

Xerxes was astonished.

"Who was your last tenant?" he asked.

"A woman who dabbled a little in the occult arts, I believe. She had a servant, a young girl, who came round this morning and said that they had concluded to move. Maybe she did not find the street to her tastes—I'm sure I don't know."

"I presume you don't know where she went?"

"We never interest ourselves in our tenants when they move away. Too much other business, you know."

Xerxes looked a little further and said that he would give the agent a definite answer before night. Then he walked out of the house and saw the gig rattle away with a thought that something very singular had taken place.

"If he failed to finish Zubiano—"

He stopped abruptly and laughed at himself.

"But he says he made no mistake," he went on. "Captain Cinnabar does not leave things one-half done. But how was that house given up so quickly when he left a dead woman there within the last forty-eight hours? How? That's what I would like to know!"

He looked at the house again before he started off, and instead of going to the pretended residence of Henry Vidal, of which he had spoken to the police lieutenant, he went direct and swiftly to Captain Cinnabar's house.

Bolting across the hall and into the parlor, he found a man lying on the floor on his face.

With a strange cry, Xerxes stooped and turned him over.

It was Monte!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GRIP OF STEEL.

"MY God! who has dealt a counterblow of this kind?" was the next exclamation that rung from the throat of Xerxes.

The man on the floor showed no signs of life, yet there was a peculiar warmth to the body which told Captain Cinnabar's right bower that he was not dead.

Xerxes dropped the hand he lifted and ran to the side-board.

Snatching a bottle of brandy from the shelf, he came back to Monte, and forced a quantity of the liquor between his lips.

The hot fluid had an instant effect, and Xerxes soon had the pleasure of seeing his companion come "back to life."

The wild glance which Monte sent round the room settled at last on Xerxes, and the grim stare of horror left his eyes for a better look.

"What did the captain lie for?" he asked, and his hand tightened on Xerxes's wrist like the jaws of a turtle.

"What did he lie about, Monte?"

"About Zubiano."

"Was she here?"

A grim smile fastened on Monte's lips.

"Yes," he said, through his teeth. "She was here."

"When?"

"When I came."

"And that was—"

"I don't know how long ago," interrupted the man in the chair at the table. "I know that I came back from Javert's trail to leave a report for the captain. I had just seated myself at this table to write it, for Captain Cinnabar was not here, when I heard my name pronounced from behind the chair. In a flash I dropped the pen and had turned half round when I was seized and my head pressed back against the chair. Then I saw a woman in the room—a tall and handsome creature, with eyes that seemed to burn like coals of fire. 'It is not the chief spider, but one of the spawn!' said she to the person who was holding my head. Then I saw her deliberately light a grayish cone which she took from her bosom, and when it was bidden by volumes of smoke she threw it at my breast, on which it broke into a thousand pieces, each one of which clung to me like a scorpion and burned like red-hot claws. I cannot describe my sufferings. I felt my strength and consciousness departing, while the hands that held me to the chair seemed to sink into my flesh. At last, by a most desperate effort, I wrenched myself loose, but as I sprung forward my agony became too great, and I knew no more. That is how it happened, Xerxes, and I know that Captain Cinnabar scotched the viper but did not kill her."

Xerxes had listened to Monte's story with bated breath. It bad for him the indescribable fascination of the horrible, but strange as it was, he did not doubt a single word.

"The cone proves the woman's identity," said he. "It was with the same terrible weapon that she triumphed over Captain Cinnabar. Then it was launched by her attendant, a young girl; now she throws it herself."

Monte writhed in the chair in sudden pain.

"The needles of fire are still in my body!" he cried. "I shall go straight to the house on Y—street and strike back."

"She is not there."

"It is her den."

"But the house is empty," persisted Xerxes. "But forget the witch of Gotham for a moment, Monte."

"I can't."

"Then keep her in your mind, but tell me what you were going to report when she came."

"It was not very much. I went back to the building where I saw Javert and Lucy, but the room was not tenanted."

"Not even by the girl!" queried Xerxes.

"Not by the girl. She has changed her quarters."

"How do you know?"

"The room gave me all the evidence I wanted."

Xerxes did not seem to relish the information.

"I know how valuable the girl has become to the captain," continued Monte. "I tried to find the trail, but Javert is a fox who covers his tracks. I found my old enemy, however."

"What! the man you tussled with on the stair?"

"Yes."

"Was he on the trail like yourself?"

"He was prowling around the station-house that holds Captain Pygmy; but he can't get the captain out. The trap operated by the police seldom releases any one—especially one like the dwarf. I wanted to lay hands on the spy, but I let him get away, seeing that I could not afford to give him another bout for the mastery."

The two men waited a long time for Captain Cinnabar, but he did not come.

At length they left a message in an empty wine-bottle in the sideboard, and left the house together.

The afternoon was drawing to a close, and where the sunlight had lately fallen the lengthening shadows of twilight were lying once more.

Xerxes and Monte did not know that almost from the very moment of their departure from the house, a pair of eyes had observed their movements, nor did they dream that the nimble feet of their tireless pursuer were keeping pace with theirs.

They crossed Broadway, and halted in front of a pawn-shop, above whose door floated the three golden balls of barter and trade.

Xerxes went inside and left Monte on the watch.

His figure, tall and agile like a cat's, was at once pounced upon by the Jew-faced proprietor of the shop.

Xerxes went straight to the counter and leaned over it.

Then diving his hand beneath his shirt, he jerked at something there, and drew forth a buckskin bag, from which he took a magnificent watch, whose outer case was set with diamonds.

The eyes of the pawnbroker glittered; they looked first at the watch and then at the man.

Xerxes smiled.

"I'll take a couple hundred on that, Levi," said he.

"You have never had it in your hands before, because I have never entered your shop till now. Shall it be two hundred?"

The Jew—like all his class—was disposed to cavil for a better bargain when the great brown hand of Xerxes swooped down upon the property.

This brought the old fellow to terms, the two hundred dollars were paid over, the article properly ticketed, and Xerxes, with money and receipt, went back to Monte.

"It's left my hands at last, and I've got rid of a bothersome secret and a troublesome piece of property," laughed he, and then he counted the money as they walked along.

"Here is one-half, Monte," he resumed handing his companion a number of bills. "This is our share of Colonel Nero's millions. Captain Cinnabar can have the rest and welcome."

"Then you are in earnest?" asked Monte.

"I am! The woman is too much for us. I know who she is. There isn't the slightest doubt of it now."

"Well, who is she, Xerxes?"

"The woman whom I followed through the cactus country with a nose years ago. I was one of Colonel Nero's executioners then, and so were you, Monte. But I was given a special mission that time. We had barely gotten rid of Queen Leo, the colonel's wife, when the other woman came to play smash with his plans. Well, I thought I had left her to perish in the land of wolf and vulture, and on a dead horse at that. Heaven knows who befriended her, but now her hand, armed as never a hand was armed before, comes between us and the Raymond bonanza. I quit the game. The watch which I left with Levi was hers. I've kept it till the hour of need. It will never be redeemed of course for here goes the ticket."

The next moment Xerxes held the pawn-ticket between finger and thumb, and then he tore it to pieces before Monte's eyes.

"They'll trip the captain," he went on. "Lady Panther is against him, Javert the sleuth has sworn to break his web, and between these parties with the police to help one and magic and vengeance to arm the other, he cannot succeed."

"I see the odds, Xerxes," answered Monte. "But he is the old captain, and our oath—"

"Better break it and live than keep it and perish!" was the interruption.

Monte, still clutching the bills, gave his companion a look of hesitation.

He halted between loyalty and desertion.

"If the captain should win we'd be princes," he rejoined.

"Yes. If he loses we'll be worse than flies in a web. Take your choice, Monte."

The two men looked one another firmly in the face.

"Where will you go, Xerxes?" Monte asked at last.

"Away from the shadow of that accursed woman!" he cried.

"But she will follow."

"Then wherever she finds me we will be equal! It will be where there are canyons and gold mines, and where one can whirl a lasso without striking a building that almost touches the sky."

"Xerxes, I shall let the captain make another play. He is certainly equal to Javert and Lady Panther."

"Stay and see!" laughed Xerxes, taking Monte's hand. "Keep your lips sealed about me when you see Captain Cinnabar. Remember, you know nothing."

"I will not forget, Xerxes."

The following moment the men had parted and Monte stopping on a corner watched the figure of his old pard till it vanished.

Then he turned back and stopped at the spot where Xerxes had torn up the pawn ticket.

His eyes scrutinized the sidewalk all around, but not a single piece of the ticket could he find.

"Pshaw! why didn't I ask him to give it to me?" he cried. "I expect to get out of the game all right if I did just feel the fingers of the witch of two shores. Captain Cinnabar and I will strike swift and hard now. He must throttle two and threaten one. And I will stand by him to the end."

Barely had Monte ceased when he felt the touch of a hand in a manner he did not relish.

As he turned he was touched on the other wrist, and as his hands were brought together, suddenly something cold touched his skin and his ears caught a sharp click.

He had been dexterously manacled, and when he drew back with a grated curse, he saw before him the handsome figure and the keen exulting eyes of Javert, the Broadway Independent!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WEB'S SUCCESS.

"ARE you closing in?" was Monte's first ejaculation.

"I want you, anyhow," was the answer.

"Well, haven't you secured me?" grinned the prisoner.

Captain Cinnabar's man cast another look at the sidewalk, but the pieces of the pawn ticket were not to be seen, and with Javert's hand on his arm he walked away, inwardly cursing the luck which had brought him back to the place where the detective was lying in wait for the game.

But Monta did not know that Javert had followed him from the very steps of Cinnabar's house, nor that the pawn ticket had fallen into the sleuth's hands.

Meantime, Xerxes was far away, having witnessed none of the misfortunes which had befallen his friend.

Eager to get away from the vengeful magic of Zubiano, or Lady Panther, he had parted with the watch taken from his last victim in the Sierras, and with the money thus raised he hoped to escape, leaving Captain Cinnabar to play the game out.

Xerxes, strong as he was, feared the woman who was against them, now that he had discovered that she was General Raymont's old enemy, when as the head of the famous Spider League of California, he was ruling with an iron hand and enriching himself at the same time.

The account given by Captain Cinnabar and Monte of the horrors of the cone bomb, were enough to deter Xerxes from remaining longer in the play. He did not know what sort of magic Zubiano was mistress of, and as she hated him with all the bitterness of hatred, she would keep back for him her most terrible agents of revenge.

If he had known that Monte had fallen into the hands of Javert the trail bound, he would have turned back, and there might have been a dash at rescue and some hot work on the streets of Gotham; but as he could know nothing of the occurrence he kept on fleeing from Zubiano and her bombs.

"Here! which way like a rocket?" demanded a voice, as a hand touched his arm.

Xerxes stopped and then gave utterance to a cry of astonishment.

He had been halted by the last man he wanted to see just then—Captain Cinnabar.

Five minutes more and he would have been out of reach.

Now he gnashed his teeth when he thought of it—he was to be dragged back into the web of fate!

Xerxes said that he was on an errand connected with the game for Raymont's bonanza, but it did not loosen Cinnabar's grip.

"Come back with me, and let the trail go," answered the Californian.

"Back to the house?"

"Yes."

Xerxes went back sullen and almost silent.

To be checked on the very threshold of safety was too exasperating.

Captain Cinnabar said nothing about the game till he had locked the door behind them.

Xerxes wondered if he knew that Zubiano had

come out of the struggle with him with her life? Had he seen the pantheress of the Sierras since his visit to the house on Y— street?

Captain Cinnabar stopped at the table, and looked down upon his man.

"I want to tell you that the game is won."

Xerxes almost bounded from the chair into which he had dropped, ready to hear a sentence of death or its equivalent.

"Won? And here he was running from the field, cowardly deserting the prize which had just fallen into their hands.

He saw that Captain Cinnabar spoke with a confidence which could not be misconstrued. The game was won sure enough, but what card had been thrown?

Xerxes fairly held his breath in his eagerness to hear more.

"I've thrown all our trumps but one, Xerxes," continued the Spider. "In the first place I have robbed the sleuth."

"Javert?"

"Javert. I have found the child."

"Which is the prize called Lucy?"

"Lucy, the daughter of General Raymont and Juliette, born years after their war in California, and here in New York."

"Then, indeed, captain, you have been very successful."

Cinnabar let a smile settle over his brown face.

"With the girl in my bands the play would not be won unless I had made another ten strike. I have just come from Nora's."

"For the second time?"

"Yes. This time I did not leave her in a dead faint at the foot of a door. She knew it was not the time for an exhibition of that sort. I was even politely received as a man always is who holds a winning hand. I threw my bomb—politely, Xerxes, if I may use the term—and I won."

"Does she divide?" exclaimed Xerxes.

"No, my boy, we get it all."

Complete surprise took possession of Xerxes.

"All, Captain Cinnabar?" he managed to say.

"Do you mean the two millions of Colonel Nero's estate?"

"I do and Nora into the bargain, for without the one we might not be able to enjoy the other."

"Captain, you take my breath. This is the biggest game we ever played. Two millions! We can afford to retire. But the sleuth still holds the trail."

"His hand is empty. He is no longer Nora's detective. His dismissal is ready and as Captain Pygmy has just done us the good fortune to die—"

"What! really die?" cried Xerxes. "Are you sure the dwarf lizard is not shamming?"

"Not this time, Xerxes. They found him dead in his cell less than two hours ago, and you may be sure that after what the police know of his tricks they are not to be fooled by another. The little captain who was playing for himself is dead enough for the resurrection this time. To-night at nine o'clock, Xerxes, you will appear at Nora's house, gotten up in evening dress, for you are to witness a quiet little ceremony which secures the millions of our old chief. Don't you understand?"

Xerxes left his chair and stared at Captain Cinnabar.

"You don't mean that you are going to marry Nora Raymont?" he exclaimed.

Captain Cinnabar broke into a laugh.

"I mean nothing else!" said he.

"Great Jehosaphat!" leaped from Xerxes's throat. "I knew you had a powerful 'hand' in reserve—that is you always said you had; but I never thought it was capable of winning the girl."

"Ah! I knew it all the time," answered the Californian, quietly, but in tones of victory.

"Young ladies don't like for certain secrets to get out into society. I had one of that kind for Nora."

"And you threatened to give it to the world?"

"That was all, Xerxes," smiled Cinnabar. "I merely threatened to produce Nora's mother. That was enough."

"When did you find her?"

"Oh, let me keep that," was the reply. "Now that the game has been won let me have one secret left. I knew my threat would fetch the girl to terms, though she indignantly rejected my proposition on the occasion of my former visit. With the prize thus secured, with Lucy out of the way, with Captain Pygmy actually dead and Javert harmless, we ought to take something, eh, Xerxes?"

Captain Cinnabar moved across the room toward the sideboard, but the voice of his right bower arrested him.

"You've forgotten one, captain," said he.

Cinnabar turned and looked at Xerxes.

"Ah! I did not mention the witch of two shores," he laughed. "Well, we are shut of her infernal magic at last, and Nora will not feel her merciless hand."

"I don't know," retorted Xerxes, with a shake of the head. "I think one of your trumps failed."

His look and his words brought Captain Cinnabar forward.

"Failed, Xerxes?" he exclaimed. "You look

like you've got a thunderbolt in reserve. Out with it!"

"Well, Zubiano has been in this house to-day." The California spider drew back as if a viper had touched his hand at the edge of the table.

"Zubiano, the dead witch?" he cried. "Impossible!"

Xerxes did not move.

"She was here with her infamous cone," he replied.

"Did you see her?"

"No; but Monte did."

"Where is Monte?"

"I don't know."

Captain Cinnabar was seen to breathe hard.

"It could not have been some one else—the maid, for instance?" he queried.

"There were two. One held Monte in his chair, while the other launched the cone."

"It was the sorceress!"

The Californian spoke through clinched teeth, and Xerxes saw the mad glitter of his eyes.

"Won't her continued existence interfere with the ceremony to-night?" he ventured.

"No!" cried Captain Cinnabar. "Nothing will interfere. My hand is on the millions of Colonel Nero, and by nine o'clock there will be no Zubiano, this time for certain, Xerxes. See that your toilet is faultless, and post Monte if you see him first. Remember! though by some means Satan helped his witch in the Y—street house, to-night the king of Tartarus will have no black-eyed witch to beat us out of the catch of the web!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DWARF'S LAST "TRICK."

WHEN Monte found himself in Javert's grip with manacles of steel which he could not break on his wrists, he wished for a second in his chagrin that Zubiano's magic cone had accomplished its purpose in Captain Cinnabar's house.

He played the role of the sullen skulking tiger when he was turned over to the police and saw written against his name the accusation of "conspiracy."

"Well, there's one chance," said he when he had been left to himself in the cell. "Xerxes has fled and the Broadway is apt to find Captain Cinnabar more than his match, and they don't try conspirators separately in American courts. So I guess it isn't so bad after all, though I would rather not be here just now."

It happened that Monte had been taken to the same police station that held Captain Pygmy, and when Javert had departed the lieutenant in charge had the dwarf escorted to Monte's cell by the turnkey.

The little schemer fell back when he caught Monte's eye, and then with a devilish chuckle of satisfaction he turned toward the officer.

"Did you get the other two?" he asked.

"What other two?"

"Xerxes and Captain Cinnabar."

"What is that one's name?"

"Monte."

"You know him then!"

"Well, don't I?" and the eyes of the little witness seemed to snap. "We've all been playing for the same stakes—General Raymont's money. What does he say?—that he isn't Monte the man from Camp Satan in the Sierras?"

"He doesn't talk," replied the lieutenant.

"No!" said Captain Pygmy going up to the bars against which Monte leaned with his eyeballs full of tigerish fire as they glared at the dwarf. "Look here, Monte, do you want me to give the officer a chapter or two from your life and the captain's? I guess I'm the man to do it, ha, ha! I know!"

A hand shot out through one of the square openings like a stone launched from a catapult.

The dwarf recoiled, but too late, for the bronze fingers had him by the throat and he was jerked forward as an agonizing cry flew from his throat.

It was a moment of excitement and confusion in the narrow corridor.

The writhing captive of the clutch could offer but a futile resistance, and his face began to grow black.

He had already passed the point of articulating a single word.

The two witnesses of the attack were paralyzed for a moment, but they soon flew to Captain Pygmy's rescue.

Monte was disposed to choke the common enemy to death then and there, but he was struck so heavily on the arm, that he loosened his grasp at last and the dwarf dropped out of his hand like one dead.

Captain Pygmy was taken to his cell and revived.

He confessed that he had had a narrow escape and declared that he would live to get even with the spider trio of New York.

But half an hour later when the watch went back to the captain's quarters to see if he was comfortable, he found the little figure huddled in one corner and motionless.

They rolled him over and saw the ghastly stare in the wide-open eyes.

"His old trick!" laughed the young lieutenant, but when the police surgeon came he pronounced the captain dead, and dead he was beyond the power of science to fetch him back to life.

This is how Captain Pygmy was found dead in his cell, but as Cinnabar had not heard of the fight in the corridor, he could not tell Xerxes that Monte's hand had helped the dwarf out of the world.

"Dead?" echoed Monte down in the depths of his heart when he was told the news.

"There's one tongue silenced anyhow; and it was a dangerous tongue, too."

Captain Pygmy was taken from the cell to the dead ward, and the day wore on.

Xerxes acted upon Captain Cinnabar's suggestion and invested in a new suit with kids that threatened to rip when he drew them over his big brown hands.

He thought no more now of flight and was sorry that he had destroyed the pawn ticket.

While he was abroad he kept on the lookout for Javert and Zubiano. He did not expect to meet the witch but he had hopes of being able to run down the only man whom he feared.

As to Javert, he had already discovered that some one had found his protegee Lucy.

He knew that the little girl had not gone off on her own account, and that Captain Pygmy from whom he had once rescued her had not turned the tabl s on him.

"No," said he, when he thought these things over in the empty room. "This is not the dwarf's work. A pair of eyes just as keen as his found her out, and I must find the Spiders to find Lucy."

He went out and down the street.

Since giving up the Broadway office in which he had thought out more than one maze of crime, he had taken up other quarters in a more secluded place and under another name.

He went straight to the new room.

"I must think a few minutes while the play moves on," the detective said. "To-morrow I was to take Lucy to Nora and make the secret plain. But Captain Cinnabar, the California sport, has come between again, and the girl is in the web. I hold the evidence of Lucy's identity, but it is worth nothing to me now. Nora is troubled over Captain Cinnabar's threat, and is almost willing to give up the fight. Nixon, her lawyer lover, is afraid to move on account of the secret the Spider threatens to divulge. I have Monte, but he won't talk, and Captain Pygmy, after playing dead a thousand times, is dead in reality. What's to be done? Why, find Captain Cinnabar and play a hand as bold as his own!"

Javert sprung from his chair, and was halfway to the door when it opened.

In an instant he was in the middle of the room looking at the unexpected visitor, who, with her bloodless hand on the knob as she held the door open, faced him with a smile at her mouth.

"Pardon me, Captain Javert, your quarry so seldom walks into your office that I think I am entitled to some consideration," said the woman. "You know me, and let us say that that is introduction enough. What have you done with the papers you carried from my house while I was tied in my chair—the victim of Captain Cinnabar's swoop? Have you taken any of them to the young lady?"

"She does not know I had them," answered the detective who had recovered from his surprise at seeing the beautiful sorceress of Gotham before him.

"Take my thanks," and Zubiano's band disappeared among the folds of her dress. "I have brought you the rest. You did not get all in your flight."

She held forth several packages which at once caught the detective's eye.

"The loosening of the cords at my neck by your hand saved my life," she went on. "You brought me back to life though you knew it not—saved me for vengeance! For days or ever since the stroke which I have confessed, you have been on my trail. You have served Nora like a faithful servant. At the same time you served Juliette, but not well enough to prevent her from taking her own life. I am not going to fly from your clutches, Captain Javert. I am Zubiano, or Ximena, or Lady Panther or whom you will. I crossed the continent to strike those whom fate brought together in New York for my band. The papers I have just given you tell the life history of Ximena, who, robbed first of her mine by the Spider League of California, was hunted down by order of Colonel Nero, afterward General Raymont of Gotham. You have already discovered that Lucy, Juliette's child, is the heir to the Raymont millions; you know, if you have gone through the papers you took from my house that there isn't a drop of Raymont blood in Nora's veins. But open the top paper, Detective Javert, and read half-way down the page."

The detective turned to the package in his hands and took up the first paper.

The sorceress of New York watched him closely while he read.

Suddenly he stopped and looked at her, his eyes filled with wonder.

"Can this be true, woman?" he exclaimed.

"As I stand in the sight of the great Judge!" cried the woman, lifting her hand. "Did you fear that I would go back and strike Nora as I struck Colonel Nero?" she quickly continued.

"Robbed as I always will believe I was of my

child by his orders, do you think I would not come to him some day with death and vengeance in my grasp? Now, Captain Javert, throw out your hand and drag your quarry to the bar of justice. Make yourself famous by finding the woman who left General Raymont dead in his library. You have found me! You find me still the sworn enemy of the Spider League. The web woven by Captain Cinnabar to catch two millions and blight the life of Nora Raymont, so called, still exists. Take me, and break the web by your own shrewdness if you can. What do you say?"

The woman's figure seemed to increase in stature as the last sentences followed each other swiftly over her lips.

She fell back, and with her hand on the knob again looked over her shoulder at the detective.

"Do you find yourself in a dilemma?" she asked, with a smile. "What! don't you care to see Nora shrink from the arms of her mother because there is red on her bands? Well, perhaps you reason justly, Captain Javert. I leave the secret with you. I live at No. 91 S—avenue at present. There I am Mrs. Montague, with one maid, whom you have met. Here—ah! you know who I am here!"

Another look crossed the space between Javert and the sorceress, and as he neither spoke nor went forward she opened the door and passed out.

"She goes to the final struggle!" cried the detective. "If she finds Captain Cinnabar I may never recover Lucy, the heir of two millions. I must stop this Jezebel of magic and vengeance."

He was out of the room before he had finished; he went down the stairs in three leaps, and on the sidewalk he almost ran against a man who caught his eye for a moment and was gone.

"Was he on the watch?" Javert asked himself, for the man he had seen, though somewhat altered in appearance, was the weaver of the web—Captain Cinnabar himself.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NINE O'CLOCK.

JAVERT followed after the man thus met unexpectedly and recognized, but Captain Cinnabar like Zubiano had vanished.

"There is another chance," murmured the detective, turning back. "This trail must have an end. Lady Panther will reappear some time to-day as Mrs. Montague."

He went to the vicinity of the house on S—avenue. It was a handsome building with good surroundings, and the last one any person would have taken for the residence of a vengeful adventurer.

He did not have to wait long, but the person who walked up the broad steps was not the sorceress but a man well dressed and evidently disguised.

The sleuth on the watch drew a little nearer.

"Ha! the wolf in new clothing!" he exclaimed. "Captain Cinnabar is going to play another hand."

A minute elapsed before his knock was answered. Javert beard him ask for Mrs. Montague.

"She is not in, sir," was the reply and the door was shut in Cinnabar's face.

Growling and disappointed, the California spider came down the steps, and Javert followed him again.

He took a well-filled car and the detective clung to the outside.

He had resolved not to lose sight of the man he had found.

Captain Cinnabar rode a long distance through the growing dusk, and when he left the car he entered a building and disappeared in the open hallway.

The detective followed still.

"Ho, here! What do you want?" said a woman's voice inside.

"The gentleman who has just entered," he replied.

"He has just gone to his daughter on the next floor."

A thrill shot through Javert's brain.

He knew he had found Lucy.

"Then, I'll not disturb him," said he. "You need not tell him that any one called," and he walked out.

Half an hour later Captain Cinnabar came out of the house alone.

The man on the watch there—the motionless figure under the trees a few yards from the door—let him depart unsfollowed.

"Now," said this watcher aloud, "I will see what is in the nest."

He went back into the house and ran against the portress on the second floor.

"Back again?" she exclaimed in ill humor.

"What do you want now?"

"The room of the gentleman who has just left the house."

"But—"

"Come, woman!" interrupted Javert. "I am a detective, and the man is a rascal. Do you want to go to the station?"

"Heavens, no! This way, sir."

Javert was led down a long hall, and a door was pointed out to him.

"The key," he said, holding out his hand.

"He took it away."

The detective seemed to measure with his eye the strength of the door.

"Don't break it in!" cried the woman, seizing his arm.

He shook her hand loose as he collected all his strength, then with a leap that would have done credit to a tiger, he sprang forward. The collision broke the door from its fastenings, and he fell into a room beyond.

"Is she dead?" ejaculated the woman who rushed in at Javert's heels and saw him lift the body of a young girl from the floor!

"No, but I came in the nick of time," and the detective marched out with his burden in his arms.

The city clocks were striking nine when a man, well-dressed and rather stylish looking despite his dark face and heavy lashes, walked up the steps of Nora Raymont's residence.

"The web has the fly in eternal durance," said he to himself while he waited to be admitted. "To-morrow I go back to the sorceress of two shores. My wedding won't interfere with my crushing her."

He walked into the well-lighted parlor of the mansion to find it empty.

"Miss Nora will be here in a moment," said a voice.

The man fell back from the sound.

He saw no one, but that voice! It thrilled him through and through.

Across the room at one side hung a rich damask curtain.

It parted before he had ceased to wonder, and Nora Raymont stepped forward leading a little girl of fifteen by the hand.

"You have played for the heir of Colonel Nero's millions, Captain Cinnabar," said the young woman with a flash of triumph in her eyes. "Let me present her to you. This is your late prisoner—the child you left strangled in her cage a short time ago—Lucy, the child of General Raymont and Juliette. You can launch your secret now. I am happy in the finding of the true heir of Raymont's wealth. My sleuth did not fail me after all. Javert is here to share in this little victory."

Captain Cinnabar glared first at the speaker and then at Lucy.

At the same time the bell tinkled in the hall beyond the room.

"Is that Xerxes coming to the wedding?" asked Nora.

The Spider of the Sierras started across the room.

"One moment, Captain Cinnabar!" said a stern voice.

The man in bronze looked back.

Javert stood beside the curtain covering him with a six-shooter, and at the same time the door swung open disclosing another revolver there.

Captain Cinnabar yielded sullenly to the irresistible.

"Let the gentleman in now, Mariette," said Nora to the maid.

But when the door was opened the step was clear. Xerxes was gone!

Just one month later a certain morning paper contained two paragraphs which by accident got side by side. One was an announcement of Nora's marriage to Noel Nixon her lawyer lover and the other told how a certain Captain Cinnabar, a prisoner awaiting trial for attempted murder, had been found dead in his cell in The Tombs shortly after the visit of a woman unknown to the warden.

Who will not say that the avenging magic of Zubiano or Lady Panther did not slay him at last, for though Javert had broken the web, the hand of justice crushed the spider in durance.

Lucy refused to accept the whole of the two millions; she even gave the Raymont mansion over to Nora while she took up her residence in a part of it, content to live with the young wife whom she loved.

Nora has never learned that she was Lady Panther's daughter.

Javert and Zubiano, if she be living, keep that secret for her, and neither will ever cloud her young life with the telling of it.

Monte was sent to prison for his share in the conspiracy of the Spider League, and Xerxes, hoping to escape the merciless hand of the sorceress, buried himself among the mountains of the Wild West.

But even there one day an Indian found a dead body lashed to a horse, and the placard on the breast, which the rains had nearly destroyed, contained but one word which was a name—

"XERXES."

In the heart of the wild land of wolf and vulture some band had found the chief spy of the Spider League, but the story of his death will never be known till all nations have been called to judgment.

Javert the Broadway Independent went back to the old office where he has more secrets than he had before he left it, and where he is sometimes visited by a beautiful young girl who is the richest of the younger heiresses of Gotham. He calls her Lucy.

THE END.

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